Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/artistsproof00aust

AN ARTIST'S PROOF.

AN ARTIST'S PROOF.

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SEASON: A SATIRE,' ETC. ETC.

'Nil nequeat nobis dignam Dis degere vitam.'—LUCRETIUS.

'Nought e'er need balk us of a godlike life.'—AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1864.

[*The Right of Translation is reserved.*]

LONDON: PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
AND CHARING CROSS.

PREFACE.

LIFE, when narrated by History, is, and when represented by Fiction should be, the result of the combined action of character and circumstance.

Impressed with this truth, which reconciles two unnecessarily conflicting historical methods, I have endeavoured to bring defined characters face-to-face with perplexing circumstances, and from them to evolve a natural but absorbing story.

But it appears to me that those characters in History, which are at once the most interesting and the most important, are precisely those which begin by contending against, then for a time seem to succumb to, but invariably end by co-operating with, their Age. These are the central figures.

Allowing, I trust, proportionate room to my

minor personages, I too have my central figure; and he lives in the nineteenth century.

This latter fact, annexed to the foregoing theory, will already suggest to many, what I trust the story itself will explain to all, the reason why I have entitled it '*An Artist's Proof.*'

AN ARTIST'S PROOF.

PART THE FIRST.

OPPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Under the freshly-budded branches of an umbrageous beech, which has encountered since that surprising spring the shifting rain and radiance of upwards of a score of years, a girl very fair to look on sat silently reading. Her eyes were so intently fastened downward on the page, that divination alone could have told their colour; and the dark lashes, which were distinctly seen, would only have made more unlikely the happy guess that they were of a lustrous blue. But even the unfavouring garden-bench on which she sat could not hide her lissom grace of form, nor a hat more designed for screen than ornament conceal the golden glories of her

rippling hair. She was not reading of Lancilotto, nor was any Paolo Malatesta by her side to throw too strong a colour on the page. Still, like Francesca, she was 'senza alcun sospetto,' dreadless quite; like her she had the 'cor gentil,' the gentle heart which love is quick to seize; and, like her, she was doomed that day to read no further on. If here the analogy must cease, it was not that her woes, if different, were destined to be less severe than the unhappy daughter of Guido of Polenta.

Measuredly across the lawn, as though nowise bent on errand of rebuke or cruel dissipation of a Mayday dream, draped in sober livery, came a figure that you would have felt must be, and yet could not be, her mother. Measuredly through the shapeless lips, as though even torture was to be justified by the calm judicial method of its infliction, came the disenchanting words:

'Isabelle! it is time for you to practise your singing.' A watch outdrawn. 'Indeed, it is after the time. You should not require to be told. Go at once, dear.'

A flush, faint and instantly gone, broke upon the smooth, transparent, upturned face.

'Very well, mamma.'

And with the word she rose and turned towards the house, but still reading, as she walked, the book which had brought on her the rebuke.

'What have you been reading?' asked the same unirritated, duty-doing voice.

'"The Pot of Basil,"' she answered, pausing and holding out the volume.

'By whom is it?'

'It is one of Keats's poems.'

'Where did you get it?'

'In the library. Mr. Dyneley recommended me to read it.'

'On those matters, my dear, as I have told you before, I wish you to follow my recommendations only. Put it back where you found it, there's a good girl, and go and practise.'

Isabelle obeyed to the letter; but that the spirit was not willing might have been concluded by one who was very quick-eyed, from the momentary compression of her irresponsible lips. Mrs. Thatchley took the seat vacated, but upon *her* lap lay the pages, chastened if uncut, of the 'Sabbath Platitudinarian.'

Surely that woman was not the girl's mother. If she were, Horace's dictum binds no longer, and eagles may procreate a dove. What consanguinity could there be between that leaden, blue-blurred face, that hair which had never been black, and was unwilling now to become grey, those slate-coloured eyes, those swollen meaningless nostrils, that stupid mouth and shapeless form, and the outline, colour, and expression of the maiden whom I have scarcely attempted, yet will not further attempt, to describe? Ah! there is a mother who is no mother, endowed with the rights but not the yearning sympathy of the parent, who has had no silent suffering time, and who has not learned the tenderness which pain sharp as death alone can teach. The best substitute for a mother is not an angel; the worst is a fiend. It must be owned that Mrs. Thatchley was neither. She was infinitely worse.

She was what is usually termed a conscientious woman. Most men have but a dim moral sense: most women have none at all. Liberty alone can evoke and train it; in a state of social and religious slavery it perishes outright. Then custom erects itself on the ruins of conscience, and assumes her

regal title. The masculine mind ever and anon rebels; but the feminine habit of obedience deifies the detestable usurper, whether his proclamation enjoin suttee or short kirtles. What 'others' do becomes a law to women; and the 'others' are the few of their early and limited experience. Some women, let us haste to own — insensible stones—are a law unto themselves. But they are terribly few, and Mrs. Thatchley was not one of them.

She acted according to her light, and that light was, as I say, sheer and supreme custom; only, unfortunately, her custom was of the most disagreeable and offensive kind. She was too religious to be genial, but too respectable not to be worldly. She had grave doubts as to whether she had a right to be happy herself; but she had no earthly doubt that nobody else had. She liked purple and fine linen vastly, but she would take mighty good care that benevolent dogs should never be a reproach to her, and would give Lazarus considerably more than crumbs provided that he remained *outside* her gates. She would not forestall heaven by striving to make earth in any way resemble it; but she

relegated hell as much as possible to hebdomadal devotion, and used it more as a threat over those who denied than as a warning to those who confessed it. She would eat and drink, but she would on no account be merry. In fact, she was that unfruitful modern hybrid, the comfortable-uncomfortable English Puritan.

Yet even Puritanism, when embodied in a plain and undowried widow of nine-and-thirty, can stoop to compromise when an ambassador comes in the shape of a well-to-do half-brother; and neither the High Church tendencies which Mr. Chesterton carried but lightly, nor the Tory principles which he held very strongly, stood in the way of her becoming domesticated at Beadon Priory. Thenceforward she went without demur to his church, and read without remark his newspapers. She was content to fight her battle, and have her way on more practical ground. That ground was the training of his daughter, for whose sake mostly, three years after the death of her mother, he had invited his widowed half-sister to his home. He might be an active member of the Conservative committee for the county, and bow his head at the mention of a

Name; but Isabelle should be brought up in the way in which she should go. She should neither be spoiled nor spared.

The exquisite little fairy was not long turned of six when, twelve years ago, she made the acquaintance of the only mamma she ever really knew; for by that title Mrs. Thatchley at once taught Isabelle to address her. During the first three years of her parent's widowhood she had been allowed full scope to develop into herself. No bird, no tree, was freer. Childishly uttering in the frankest manner every little thought she had, she never said anything which a genial listener would not have delighted to hear. She was completely unrestrained, yet the most severe could not have found her forward. She worshipped her papa, and loved impulsively everybody else who loved her. Prettily as she talked, she spoke even more so. Indeed, she was the most childish child, and the most thorough little lady, that ever ran over sward or nestled upon lap.

The stranger came, and set herself conscientiously to work to snatch this little brand from the burning. To see a girl so happy, and if not unemployed, at

least employed to no severe purpose, was too shocking a spectacle not to be at once put down. I have seen, more or less unmoved, a fair amount of human misery; but I declare I have not the heart to describe the details of that seven years' war waged within the precincts of Beadon Priory, in which Mrs. Thatchley came off apparently victor. I have seen deaths on cold doorsteps and in hot feversheds, and could take artist's courage, were there need, to portray them; but, like a flogged coward, I sneak away from describing those bitter, bursting tears of the sweet little fay who, since she cut her baby teeth, had never shed tears before. At first papa had his doubts; and there was some hope that his alliance might be obtained for the pitiable pet, now turned victim. But the correction, which had begun by venting itself on imaginary faults, soon succeeded in creating real ones. A free soul is a sweet sight, but none of us can wholly sympathize with a rebel; and the despotic protectress was not long in transforming the first into the second. By the time she was seven, Isabelle was profoundly unhappy; by the time she was nine, intensely passionate; and by

the time she was twelve, she was simply sullen. Through all these changes she had preserved her beauty; but she seemed to have lost everything else, even to her fondness for her papa. At fourteen, as I said, the struggle ended; and Mrs. Thatchley congratulated herself on having broken a most stubborn spirit, trained a most vagrant nature, made of a sloven a model of neatness, and of an unreflecting chatterbox a reticent and well-behaved young girl. There was every certainty, she assured her brother, that their daughter—for *their* daughter she invariably called her — would turn out a most accomplished and amiable lady; and he, poor fellow, having the last eight years come to regard Isabelle as a young demon, was but too glad to take comfort and faith from the assurance. Two more years—very quiet years—passed away, and at sixteen Isabelle was regarded by Mrs. Thatchley as perfect as anything can become and be kept by the only means which she conceived could at all create and maintain perfection—*viz.* periodical supervision and reproof. She had the most complete command over her temper and her tongue. Of sullenness there was not the slightest trace; of anger, never a hint.

She appeared happy, even cheerful. True, she did not take a very earnest interest in what she was told to do; but, at any rate, she always did it. And as she was not surrounded by paradoxical people, she was not likely to be subjected to the criticism that 'she is all fault who hath no faults at all.'

Mr. Chesterton still knelt in the same pew, and still rallied round the same old party-cries, as in the days when his knees were more supple, his seat was more steady, and his voice more hearty, than they could boast of being now. But somehow the same sort of people did not habitually come to the Priory as in the gracious days of the buried mistress, to whose memory glowed the marble monument in the chancel of Beadon Church. His former male friends stuck to him, and were as cordial as ever on hustings or hunting-field; but their stout legs did allegiance under other mahogany than that at which presided his respectable relative. She had changed his set for him imperceptibly, but long before this time with unmistakable distinctness. Some men are very manageable. She had robbed him of everything worth having, and I declare he never knew it.

The two years and odd that intervened between Isabelle's attaining her sixteenth year and the time at which this story commences, were spent in 'masters.' She had a 'master' from London for every conceivable subject; and though not one of them was ever loud in her praise, they all commended her attention. Nor had Mrs. Thatchley been idle. She had spent most of this period in considering whom Isabelle ought to marry; and she had, some six months previously, arrived at a conclusion. In her decision it is unnecessary to state that her brother completely concurred. Mr. Chesterton's name was a good enough one in the county; but he was a younger son of a junior branch, and held his small estate, worth but some fifteen hundred a-year, only for life. So that his daughter, with all her misfortunes, past and prospective, escaped the misery of being an heiress. Men are not so mercenary, even yet, as they are usually represented, especially when a winsome face steps in to perplex their calculations; and Isabelle would not have been likely to suffer from her father's having but little to leave, even if her future had been handed over to chance. But her mother—

as Mrs. Thatchley was often called — did not believe in leaving anything either to chance or beauty. It was certainly not by the instrumentality of either that she had won her deceased husband for herself; and Isabelle, even though she might not need it, was to have the benefit of the same active and scientific discretion.

The property adjoining that which Mr. Chesterton held for life, was held by George Forrester for ever. To him let us not be unjust. Some people called him a nincompoop, and some a good fellow. He was three-and-thirty, untravelled, nervous, decent enough to look at, awkward rather for a gentleman, weak as water in everything but principle, commonplace, no more narrow-minded than his neighbours, a bad shot, an indifferent rider, having nothing to say worth hearing, but a good son to the old aunt who lived with him, and honest as the day. He was as incapable of saying a clever thing, as of doing a dirty one. He would no more have thought of making love to Isabelle Chesterton, or to any other woman, than of jumping from Beadon spire, if he had not been prompted so to do; and he would just as quickly have done the second as he

was now doing the first, if Mrs. Thatchley had commanded it. Not that she had told him in so many words, that he was to marry Isabelle; but she held him flesh and soul in the leash of her will, and he obeyed her eye as rapidly as her lips. Mrs. Thatchley had frankly avowed her intention to her brother, and he had entered cordially into the arrangement; but to no third person had either hinted a word. For all that, their intentions were as manifest as if they had called them out at market-cross; and Isabelle was not the last person to discover them.

She might have been practising half-an-hour, and Mrs. Thatchley placidly dozing over the turned-upside-down pages of the 'Platitudinarian' some three-and-twenty minutes, when from the stables there came walking across the lawn a figure whose step, though not hurried, was too quick and too straightly directed towards the just-awakened matron to belong to a denizen of the Priory. His tread was firm yet supple; and a small riding-cane, which he held in a closely-gloved hand, was grasped with a tightness quite out of proportion with either its weight or its use. His dress was as near that of a

fop's without being such, as is possible to consummate artistic skill. In hitting this happy medium, he was assisted by a figure as much above the middle height as is necessary for physical superiority, and as little above it as is requisite for grace. His countenance was not statuesque enough to be ordinarily deemed handsome, though its features were clearly chiselled, and a pair of outlooking large brown eyes reposed under a broad but concentrated brow. He had a slight moustache, and just tolerated whiskers; but even under his hat, the abundance of dark chestnut hair could be detected, finishing a head about which the most enthusiastic of young ladies would not have raved, but which the most prosaic of governesses would have quietly commended. Rightly or wrongly, a believer in physiognomy would have pronounced him 'well-balanced.' He must have been about twenty-four. His name was Mortimer Dyncley.

An ordinarily shrewd man, after ever so little experience, gives up looking into women's faces for the expression of their feelings. Moreover, as Dyncley knew well enough that his presence would not be over-welcome to Mrs. Thatchley, he troubled himself more to throw cordiality into his own

manner than to detect the absence of it in hers. He was the only person who, after failing thoroughly to propitiate, did not concern himself either to avoid or deceive her. If you had asked her what she thought of him, she would have said that he was a very charming young man, and added some 'but' that would not have sounded particularly damning. Had you asked him what he thought of her, he would have told you bluntly that he thought her simply detestable. Yet he tried slightly to like her, and she thoroughly to dislike him. Oddly enough, neither succeeded. He did not fear her in the least, but he had the keenest sense of her domestic and social power. She knew, or thought at any rate, that he had no power on earth; still the fear of him, the only fear she had in the world, was too fast on her to be shaken off. Nature had made them antagonists, and circumstances had intensified the hostility. As he sat down on the bench beside her, there was really nothing to provoke the suspicion that they were not excellent friends. For all that, she really was not much of a hypocrite, and he was the most straightforward fellow on earth.

They had not been conversing—much as other people converse—for five minutes, when Isabelle stepped out of the conservatory at the end of the drawing-room and approached. Let us look hard and see what we can make of the greeting.

Stately, very. A looker-on cannot measure the pressure of palms, and you will have to remain in doubt whether the detection of a brighter lustre in his brown eyes, and a delicate compression of her undulating lips, be due to your sharp sight or to your suspicious imagination. A few playful words were all that followed to enlighten. And then:

'Isabelle, my dear, you ought not to have left your practising. Another half-an-hour, and then you will have done enough. I am sure Mr. Dyneley will excuse you.' A gracious bow of assent from him, and a 'Good-bye, Mr. Dyneley,' from her. 'Of course,' continued Mrs. Thatchley to him, now again her only companion, 'of course you understand how necessary it is for a girl of her age not only to attend to her studies, but to be constantly employed.'

A courteous 'quite so' was his sufficient answer to a remark which it was impossible to contradict

or discuss. And he set himself bravely to work, for a good twenty minutes, to talk with madame upon every conceivable subject that was not worth talking about at all. Whatever might have been her wishes, he did not intend to go yet awhile. Indeed he meant to be invited to stop for dinner, just as she meant not to invite him. For the present, time had to be gained. Steadfast maintenance of the conversation was his only chance; and he worked away at it gallantly. Both invention and execution were beginning slightly to flag when, to his relief, he saw coming, as he had himself come, from the stables, the briskly-moving nervous form of George Forrester. That Forrester would remain and dine he was positive, and this would materially assist him in compelling an invitation for himself. The new comer was greeted as George by the lady, and with like familiarity by Miss Chesterton, who, now again approaching, was this time not dismissed. Forrester, however, did not retort with her Christian name, and seemed to find it difficult enough to call her by any. He was a nervous, jealous man, trying to appear neither. Dyneley was completely at his ease. Isabelle was

temperately frank with both. Mrs. Thatchley unflinchingly supervised.

We are all pretty well aware by this time that there were strong men before Agamemnon; but not many are aware that there were good games before the invention of croquet. One of these Miss Chesterton contrived to set going, her mother assigning to her Forrester for partner, and for herself retaining Dyneley. It was not very amusing to this last, but it brought him another half-hour nearer to dinner-time, and gave him two opportunities, of each of which he availed himself. One was when, as at the close of the game and in the insolence of victory, he was sending his opponents' balls in opposite directions, he said to Miss Chesterton, *sotto voce,*

'I will not unite you even in death;' and received for reply a clever shudder and the equally softly-spoken words,

'For pity's sake, *don't!*'

The other was when, victory achieved, and they were collecting the implements of war, he contrived to whisper,

'Ride, Tuesday and Thursday mornings, in the heart of the Chase.'

And was answered briefly, 'If I can.'

The time, however, came when Dyneley must either be asked to stay or must go. Miss Chesterton had proposed another game, but this had been by supreme authority refused. Round the gravel-path travelled nearer the leisurely step of the owner. No more benevolent old gentleman ever trod than Mr. Chesterton; and for no one had he a stronger natural liking than for Mortimer Dyneley. But we know the proverbial power of 'whispering tongues;' and the presence, once so agreeable to him, made him now positively uncomfortable. Not but that he still liked Dyneley vastly, as he had liked his father before him. But he had been induced at last to believe undesirable, and to welcome less cordially, or scarcely at all, visits which he had once assured Mortimer could not be made too often. He was a shocking bad hand at concealment; and his embarrassment was the evident result of perplexity and semi-shame. And when Miss Chesterton asked aloud,

'What time do we dine, mamma?'

And there came the cold answer, 'Half-past six,' and one guest was evidently going, and the other was evidently not, he could not, for all the prospective curtain-lectures from this to doomsday, have kept down the hospitable query,

'You will dine with us, will you not?'

So Mrs. Thatchley was vanquished for once at least. And there was malicious but justifiable joy in two breasts at any rate, over that impenitent sinner doing penance.

Mrs. Thatchley took Mortimer's arm and placed him in solitary precedence on her right, Isabelle and Forrester confronting him from her left. Most people are too busy during dinner to watch their neighbours very closely; but this is the most favourable opportunity for such examination. The old proverb about wine must be extended to the meats. One natural act induces another; and in actively confessing their hunger, men and women are apt to lay aside a few artifices rigidly paraded at less spontaneous moments. For the life of him Mr. Chesterton could not conceal, after his first glass of sherry, that he must once have been exceedingly genial, nor Mrs. Thatchley, after

her second, that she was still rather vulgar. Nor had the hospitable meal far advanced before it was quite evident that, whatever effect warnings in sober day might have upon him, the rapidly warming host much preferred the discourse of Dyneley, who could and did talk, to that of Forrester, who perhaps did, but certainly could not. This dangerous cordiality his sister did not fail to notice, and was not likely to fail to attempt to disturb. On the score of politics she knew well enough she would be unable to create anything like discord, for Mr. Chesterton and his young guest held pretty much the same political opinions, though probably their reasons for holding them, if given, would have been very different; and the former resembled most people in thinking any reasons good that upheld the right conclusion, just as he would have thought any bad that upheld the wrong one. But there was a discovery she had recently made and professed to lament, but which she rejoiced over with the glee of a knight who has hit upon a crevice in his opponent's armour, and whereof she deemed this an excellent opportunity for availing herself. She let her brother drivel on from subject to sub-

ject till she found him approaching one, then as now, fruitful of social charity, *viz.* that of Church and State. He had concluded, or at least abandoned, a great many sentences in which institutions, and rights, and interests, and religion had been dwelt upon and jumbled with customary fidelity to the forms of language, and had been once or twice nervously supported by Forrester, when Dyncley said calmly, in his frank, reckless manner, 'Not a doubt of it. Your reasons are most excellent. But it seems to me there is a better reason even than any you have given for maintaining their union. The time was when despotic power was eminently serviceable in the education, both political, social, and religious, of the European world; but that time, Mr. Chesterton, we fully, of course, believe to have passed away for ever, do we not?'

'Of course we do. Why—'

And he was going to start off on a long recrimination of a leader he had recently read in a local paper, in which the opposite opinion had of course been expressed; but Mortimer thought he had a right to his innings, and skilfully tripped him up.

'Of course we do. And having grown out of the need of autocracy, we are not going to put any other supreme power in its place, not even the absolute will of a democratic majority. But of all supremacies that cannot any longer, and never will again, be anything but dangerous, spiritual supremacy is the one against which we ought the most carefully to guard. Men who consider their teaching and mission immutable, will regard their authority in much the same light; and having once been free from contradiction, would fain remain dogmatical to the close. As free agents among a free audience, the clergy of this, as of every other country, cannot fail to be of service. But so long as their pretensions be what they are, the State is the best, and, as I conceive, the only instrument for tempering and, when necessary, controlling the action of the Church. For these reasons, no less than for yours, I would on no account assent to any measure that would weaken their natural, fruitful, and beneficial union.'

Miss Chesterton alone had comprehended the argument. Her father alone cared for the conclusion, which he heartily applauded. Forrester had

been too well aware of the direction in which a pair of blue eyes were all the time intently turned, and Mrs. Thatchley, too anxious to break in with a remark which she now thought might be opportunely made, to be anything but uncomfortable.

'I am surprised to find you so stanch a supporter of the Church, Mr. Dyneley, as I am assured that you rarely or never go there.' (What a funny confusion of terms!)

'If you think from my argument,' Dyneley answered, without the slightest confusion, and throwing into his manner a more than usually playful courtesy, 'that I ought to go, I fear I have expressed myself very inefficiently. I gave political reasons for political conduct. For that part of religious conduct which is implied by going or not going to church, surely, my dear Mrs. Thatchley, I am not called upon to give any.'

His chivalric but fearless straightforwardness gave her nothing to say at the time; but it left her a good deal to say when there were not so many listeners. The conversation shifted to other topics, and so on to others, Dyneley smiting poor Forrester into silence, having Miss Chesterton's

ears whenever she dared not lend him her eyes, still further entangling his host in friendly talk, and still further satisfying his hostess that he was the most dangerous person whom she had ever met. He thought so differently from everybody across whom she had come since childhood, and he said so bravely what he thought, that she endeavoured to consider him as utterly unbearable. But he was too deferential to hers and everybody else's opinion, when most asserting his own, for her either to be able to quarrel or induce others to quarrel with him. And, indeed, she could afford to forgive him. She imagined that she had by this time pretty well discovered what he was driving at, and was thoroughly convinced that she could easily prevent him attaining the intended goal.

So that when he asked for his horse to be brought round, she no less than her brother said that he was going away very early. And when Forrester did not ask for his, they both thought he was never going at all. Whatever the daughter's thoughts might be, she kept them strictly to herself. Indeed, she had rarely hazarded a remark, and never an opinion, the whole evening. And if, as he rode

home in the balmy May night, Mortimer did not say to himself, 'What a very elegant but extremely stupid young person!' he cannot have troubled himself much about her, or must have had other means of forming a judgment than ordinary spectators. But before he struck heel into his impatient steed, he dropped his customary half-crown into the palm of old Jeff, who muttered, as he clattered out into the road,

'Ar, that's the sort o' gemm'an I'd like to see comin' about the place. But we don't have many o' him now, and I fear we shan't have him much longer. Jack won't get much out o' t'other chap. See to Mr. Forrester's oss, Jack; I'm off.'

And to bed went as faithful an old servant as ever stayed with English gentleman for five-and-twenty years, but who would not have stayed another day, had it not been for two as light hands and two as kindly eyes as ever held lady's rein or looked a lady's thanks.

CHAPTER II.

Mortimer Dyneley's father had been, during the first half of his life, an unattached but ornamental unit of that big, clumsy total, called society; and during the second half, the trusted and useful steward of a big Earl, in a big northern county. The experience and manners acquired in the early part of his career, obtained for him a welcome which materially sweetened the later; but while he conscientiously managed and improved the affairs of his patron, he paid but indifferent attention to his own. A widower with an only son, he visited the Earl and the Earl's acquaintances on a footing of the most complete equality. 'Dear Jack Dyneley' was in all their mouths, and at all their tables; and as he had the finest palate and the most renowned, if the smallest, cellar of them all, they sometimes made themselves his guests in turn. The fascination of their society he could no more resist, than

they could resist the fascination of his. So though he took good care never to run into debt, he spent his 800*l.* a-year allowed him by the Earl like a man, and never put away a sixpence. Regarding himself as the most fortunate fellow upon earth, and justly attributing his good fortune to his excellent address and accomplished tongue, he thought he could do nothing better for Mortimer, than give him the same education from which he had himself reaped such comfortable profit. At eighteen years of age, the lad, though more stately and perhaps more dignified than his father, was fully as well-looking and as well-bred; and if not so intensely popular a favourite over fences or under oak, was withal lovingly regarded by the gentlemen of the soil, with whom, during the holidays, he also had freely consorted. The Earl asked one day if he was to go to college.

'College, my lord? No, indeed. *I* never was at college. He already knows quite enough of what is taught there to teach it to himself, if he have any desire to know it. I shall send him to travel.'

And with a promise of 300*l.* out of the 800*l.*

a-year, and a farewell admonition to 'make no debts and fight no duels,' Mortimer, at eighteen, was free to go where he listed. If, thought his father, at the end of three or four years, some of those fine friends of mine will not be but too glad to do something for the boy, he is not, and they are not, what I take them to be.

The son had been absent some three years-and-a-half, and the father was beginning to be anxious to see what time and travel had done for him, when an ugly fall took all the value out of Jack Dyneley's crack hunter, and made sad havoc with Jack Dyneley's own limbs. He would have saved his leg at all hazards but the final hazard of all, and gave in to the decree of amputation when he was too powerless to resist. At last an old squire took courage to tell him what they were saying down stairs, that amputation was the last chance, and that it too might fail.

'All right,' he answered; 'it's a bad business, but broken timber is broken timber, and I suppose I must take the big fence ahead. I should like to see my wine-merchant, if you'll tell him to come as soon as ever he can.'

The old squire was mightily puzzled, and thought Jack might, at such a moment, have asked for a more appropriate visitor than the minister of Bacchus. This last too, though one of Jack's oldest and stanchest allies, was not prepared for such singular precedence. However he started off at once, heard from the surgeons, whom he met descending the crippled man's staircase, that a couple of days must end the misery, and in a moment saw plainly enough for himself that they were about right. The poor fellow, though with all the strength nearly out of him, received his chum with even jocose welcome.

'Look here! old boy!' he said, stretching out his hot hand, 'I sadly want you to help me when nobody else can. There's my lad, whom they've sent for to Italy; but though they don't tell *me* so, I know well enough, I shall never see his brave face at this bedside. Unless he be much altered, he is, as you know, as likely a young fellow as ever this country, not a bad hand at growing gentlemen, ever bred. That my friends will see he gets a fair start at something, and that he will then keep his head well forward, never you fear any more than I

do. But a younker ought not to be left without a few hundreds, if it be only to rattle in his pocket. People are always quicker to help you when you don't seem to want help. Now I haven't a rap to leave Mortimer, and shan't have unless you'll do for me what I think is fair enough, though it would not do for it to be found out. You know the sort of wine I've always had, and what a reputation my bit of a cellar has in the county. Well, it's as near empty now as may be, and I want you to fill it choke full, till not another bottle will go into it. Not with the prime vintages the old place has known all along, nor yet with rubbish. But I want you to fill it with the very cheapest wines that cannot possibly do anybody harm, though not likely to do anybody good. How long do they say I shall last? Come, tell me.'

'Well, a couple of days at any rate.'

'Then you've a couple of nights for your work. Let it be done as secretly as possible, and see that nobody blabs. As soon as I'm gone, advertise for sale all the wine in my cellar; and if it doesn't bring a jolly long price, there's no such thing as what we used to read of at school, no *fama superstes:*

reputation's not worth having. Give Mortimer the profit and my blessing, and accept the last, old boy, for yourself.'

Jack Dyneley was obeyed to the letter and died in peace. His wines fetched an enormous price, and are still the boast and glory of many a northern magnate's table. Mortimer reached home, to look mournfully upon his father's grave, and to receive through his father's friend, the faithful vintner, a sum little short of nine hundred pounds. He never knew, any more than the rest of the world, how narrowly he had escaped being the inheritor of a much more limited fortune, and often used innocently to say how he wished he had some of the rare old ports that had been sold off at his father's death.

'Dear Jack Dyneley' was not wrong when he gave his friends credit for willingness to do something for his son, and his son credit for being worth doing for. But who shall blame them if they were too much occupied with their own and others' more importunate concerns not to wait until Mortimer presented his claims, and if they forgot all about him when he never took the trouble even to present him-

self? Four years—especially four such revolutionary years as intervene between eighteen and twenty-two — had made them and him entire strangers. Had he been hard pressed for an outlook, he might perhaps have sufficiently made away with his natural and acquired dignity, to seek counsel and assistance from those who he could scarcely doubt would open to him if he would only knock and keep on knocking. But it so happened that an opportunity of advancement presented itself, unsolicited; and unsolicited opportunities were more to Mortimer's taste. Between his father and his father's cousin, Roger Dyneley, there had subsisted if not absolute estrangement, at least persistent coolness; but in passing through London on his way to the Continent, Mortimer had visited and with his graceful manners completely fascinated his metropolitan relative. However, he would not, in spite of much warm pressure, stay to complete a conquest that, if turned to account, would have altogether set aside the schemes of travel upon which he was then enthusiastically bent. Upon his now being summoned home, he called on Mr. Dyneley and met with a welcome, to say the least, as cordial

as that of four years back; and was given to understand that his future should be the care as his person and address were the delight of his more than sexagenarian cousin.

In the last year of the long struggle which ended in consigning to a wave-washed boulder the nineteenth century Prometheus, Roger Dyneley had made a bold financial stroke for fortune, and had succeeded. He was before and remained after it an impenitent bachelor; but the possession of fifteen thousand a year materially increased his importance, if it did not alter his position. That he had cared to make it seemed inexplicable to many, since he seemed to evince the greatest care not to spend it. He bought an estate where he never resided, but which returned him for a neighbouring borough, and rented a good but not pretentious house in a square which fashion has long since deserted. That he was rich everybody knew; but that he spent most if not all of his income, very few suspected. He was considered penurious by people who squandered their incomes in luxuries which would have been to him scarcely an indulgence. His gratifications were such as Western morality does

not prevent a man from enjoying, but strictly forbids him to parade. Truth to tell, he was a systematic sensualist, with an average good character. There were men—and still more women—who were pretty well acquainted with his practices; but the former had as little reason to expose as the latter had good reason to suppress them. Had he been a prominent public character, or been invested with the interest which attaches to a title, his name might not have escaped the prurient curiosity of the virtuous. But a silent and undecorated member of the House of Commons, who, though he have a princely fortune, does not spend it in the market-place, may rival Lothario without having to envy Joseph. He had abilities which he had never cared to cultivate, and opportunities of doing good to himself and others which he never even saw. He was as selfish as he was agreeable. Courtesy itself to all who ministered to his pleasure, to those who interfered with it he was pitiless as fate. To everybody else he was simply indifferent. His dress and bearing was as young at sixty-five as they had been at sixteen, and his hunger for enjoyment was fiercer than ever. But Nature would not be true to herself

if his constitution had kept pace with his cravings. The appetite may elude her ravage; but she will vindicate her title on the jaw.

Had Mortimer been deformed, ugly, or ungraceful, or returned from his wanderings with the habits often acquired abroad of an incorrigible Bohemian, neither ability nor relationship would have recommended him to so much as Mr. Dyneley's recognition. His cousin would not only have externally ignored, but would have internally and *bonâ fide* forgotten him. Returning with the comeliness of youth united to the repose of early manhood, fluent in three languages besides his own, almost courtly in his dignity of approach, and lordly in a well-worn self-esteem, he recommended himself as much to the vanity as to the taste of his would-be patron.

Had Mortimer's father left him a competency, Mr. Dyneley would not the less have shrunk from attaching him as a client, and, making a virtue of necessity, would have added to the competency a decent, perhaps a handsome allowance. But the pittance which the young fellow had inherited, gave the old man an opportunity of having a highly

creditable dependent at a very small cost. So that when he announced his willingness to strive to obtain for Mortimer some diplomatic or other similar appointment, he was not forced to obtain his grateful assent at a higher price than an allowance meanwhile of five hundred a-year. His own gratification and not the other's advancement being his object, it was enough for him to know that five hundred a-year would not be rejected by one who had no income at all. And official appointments being within the scope of his influence, he would never have thought of inquiring into the young man's character and tastes. With these, however, it is time that we should form an acquaintance.

Very early on in his school career, Mortimer Dyneley betrayed a mental peculiarity, then as now most rare among his countrymen. He valued nothing at its use; he prized everything according to its beauty. It was idle to tell him that pure mathematics were the best education for the mind, or the machinery most likely to be serviceable to the majority of men living in a mechanical and industrial age. The first proposition he flatly denied, and had at least the authority of Gibbon

on his side; the second he did not consider required any answer at all. But when the inquiry was diverted from the properties of x and n, to the orbit of Saturn and Mars, or the occult powers of y were abandoned for the discussion of the theory of light, he manifested an interest disproportionate with his years. His self-respect made him master the Latin and Greek grammars, though he found them both detestable; and an acute sense of dignity alone induced him to construe with decency the stupid excerpts which are considered not too difficult, but quite interesting enough, for the boys of a northern nation. But when these were surmounted, and there were opened to him the pages of philosophical historians, and still more philosophic poets, his enthusiasm for the tongues no longer spoken this side Acheron was as intense as it was spontaneous. He never wrote a pentameter or designed an Alcaic strophe, save under something approaching to compulsion; and of the full measure of 'particles,' though he assuredly had a semi-instinctive notion, he would never be troubled to acquire accurate information. But the precise pedagogue who had written learnedly on

these, had but a dim notion of the pregnant beauty of this adjective, of the liberal signification of that abstract noun, or the changeable harmony of that other sonorously inserted verb, compared with the brown-eyed pupil, who, he said, could never be made a scholar. A scholar, indeed, he never became; but even at eighteen he conversed with the great Pagan shades with a familiarity that might have been envied by many a man whose classical attainments have been deemed deserving of a mitre.

He started on his travels, and it was soon apparent that he would treat life as he had treated, and still continued to treat, the printed legacies of the wise, *viz.* as an end, not as a means. He found existence too good and beautiful to be put to intentional use. Itself should be its sole occupation and reward. With the soul of the contemplative artist, he needed not the employments of the restless or guerdon-seeking craftsman. Not to labour among instruments, but to repose among results, was his persistent pursuit. Even in the studio he was dissatisfied, since there he pined for the gallery. Perhaps he could wait while a nymph was being formed

from foam of the sea, or a goddess struck from the anvil of an immortal's brain; but the sight of a brush or the sound of a chisel was sufficient to mar his luxurious joy. He would walk through acres of 'curiosities,' and only yawn or be cynical; but at sight of suggestive torso or glimpse of judicious drapery, he and his enthusiasm would suddenly re-awake. For a year-and-a-half he wandered; but with such a turn of mind as his it was pretty certain where he would soon sit down and halt. And after eighteen months' vagrancy, he was never again this side the Alps till his father's death summoned him from beyond the mountains.

He had taken his peculiarity to a land where it stood a good chance of ripening into a disease. A man who rests in Italy and is not thankful must have upon him the curse of Ahasuerus. Most wandering Westerns take their vulgar restlessness with them thither, as they would take it to heaven if they ever get admitted, or would with it invade the *Divum numen sedesque quietæ*, were they acquainted with such classical abodes. Hence it is not surprising if their assertion of enjoying the sweet Peninsula be nothing more than a lie to cloak their vanity and

excuse their folly for not having remained at home. But Mortimer was imitating the wings of the dove, in order to obtain the dove's reward. He was in Italy; and though he was constantly moving within its sea and snowy limits, within those limits he was assuredly at rest. He found cathedral doors ajar from blue dawn until dusk, without tonitrant interruptions from intolerant pulpits. No imputation of idolatry followed on his intercourse with painted saints and angels, whom he undoubtedly worshipped. Nor was any industrious finger pointed at the indolent form which found in a sunset or a spire unremunerative and unexciting but sufficient employment. Surrounded by men with whom courtesy is first and last habit, and by women who reflect the intensity of their clime without excluding its softness, he found society as indulgent of his tastes as were even nature and art. He read and looked and lived for reading, looking, and living's sake, and entirely without any ulterior design. So that though his knowledge was extensive, and his experience of human nature vast and various, they served but to leave him happy, not to equip him for any accomplishment. It would have been difficult for a young

man's mind to be better stocked to less purpose. In England or France he would have been almost as much in everybody's way as he would have found everybody in his. But one who united the manly graces of a northern person to the dreamy dilettanteism of a southern mind was sure to be dear to the Italian eye. 'Mio caro' in every masculine mouth, I fear he was 'mio diletto' in many feminine breasts. Unlike their more northern sisters, who are rarely ever liberal unless they intend to be permanently exacting, they found in his occasional society, as he in theirs, a final compensation. Having treated him with generosity while he stayed, they did not upbraid him when he was compelled to leave. The sentimental regret felt by both was tinged with no remorse for either. He had never pretended violently to love, but had never for a moment ceased to be respectful. His attachments, as his reading and the rest of his existence, never influenced by sordid motives, nor exasperated by laborious passion, could be exchanged for fresh ones equally gracious, but could never be degraded below the dignified level of themselves. He was not in the least spoiled, provided that he could remain where he was. But

for society, more corrupt since more correct, he was spoiled—the timid would have feared irretrievably.

It was certainly Mr. Dyneley's wish that he should remain in London. At first Mortimer did his best to be entertained. But there is no trying so certain to fail as the trying to enjoy in the teeth of one's tastes. The society that on his arrival he found simply dull, he soon felt to be altogether intolerable. What it dignifies with the title of 'amusements,' though he did not find them amusing, he might have learned to endure, if among the spectators he had been able to discover any with a capacity for less artificial and more genial pastimes. But between women of the middle-class who, it seemed to him, had no manners, and those of the upper classes who had nothing else, he encountered an alternative but no choice. Finished falsehood is a bad thing; but uncultivated nature is, if not worse, at least more disagreeable. And the internal simplicity united to external polish which had fascinated him in Italy, he looked for in vain at home. Too fastidious to be satisfied with the gestures of a bourgeoise, and too honest to be content without the heart of a patrician, he was not likely to find in a society where plutocrats want to

be aristocrats, and aristocrats want to be plutocrats, companionship such as he desired. So, whilst never absenting himself from Mr. Dyneley's dinner parties, and occasionally putting in an appearance at other gatherings, where the old man's vanity demanded the concession, he soon ceased to be prominent in circles which his cousin was good enough to assure him he would at present ornament, and shrewd enough to impress upon him he would some day find of use. And without abandoning or closing his rooms in town, he established himself about twenty miles from it, in a spot where, the morning after the scene described in the first chapter, we find him indolently stretched upon the lawn.

Few establishments, large or small, convey any idea of the character of their owners, except in their inconsistency and incompleteness. Gracewood Cottage was Mortimer Dyneley reproduced in flower-bed, gravel-path, stable-yard, hayrick, dining-table, every conceivable part and parcel of his small but comprehensive home. There was no portrait of him on the walls; but he looked at you from every panel, spoke to you from every curtain-fold, and warned you from every climbing rose. Every-

thing was finished; nothing was being done. And I defy the scrutiny of the most critical to point out anything that needed doing. But there was no more a single costly article of furniture than there was a single inelegant one: luxurious baubles were as absent as clumsy chairs. If his was the house of a Sybarite, at least it was the house of a manly Sybarite. There was an absence of crumples; but he lay upon something more masculine than rose-leaves. The garden and orchard were in keeping with the cottage: tiny but complete, the perfection of grace, the despair of ostentation. They could not have been more hemmed in by trees had they been cleared out of an Amazonian forest; and the hum of their insects or the twitter of their birds was as incessant as if they were.

How, it may be wondered, had he got it, or the money which must have gone to the making of it? In an age of costly blunders, the question may be understood and forgiven. But the answer is easy. Thirty years before, it had been, if not so lovely as now, a place withal of singular beauty. But the combined, or rather rival, meanness of its landlord and its tenant had ended in obliterating to all but

the deep-seeing nearly all its charms; and when Mortimer, on his return from abroad, had accidentally stumbled on it, he found a wilderness with which, though now offered for a rental of 60*l.* per annum, nobody would venture to grapple. He saw at a glance that Nature had done everything she could for the tiny nook; and he had the most complete competence in his power to do the rest. He was not a good financier; but regarding debt as a sort of disorder, he was offended by it accordingly, and no more allowed it than any other ugly thing to fasten itself on his life. And it was not till after he had satisfied himself that the 900*l.* left him by his father would repair and furnish the modest though neglected paradise which a fishing expedition had presented to his gaze and talents, that he resolved upon applying for a lease. He felt that he could not spend the slight legacy with more piety to his parent or more benefit to himself. As long as the 500*l.* a-year allowed him by Mr. Dyneley remained 500*l.* a-year, upon that sum his bachelor establishment could well be maintained. If some home appointment were to increase his income, Gracewood would still content his

country desires. If some foreign appointment sent him abroad, and he were obliged to sublet, a certain rental of 130*l.* would only further prove the wisdom of his choice.

I shall quickly forgive, but must as quickly undeceive, any of my readers who have been led to imagine, from the whispered sentences which passed between Mortimer and Miss Chesterton, that they were upon a footing of furtive intimacy, and that pre-arranged rides were weekly, if not more frequent, occurrences. Their bridles had never yet hung side by side; and not only was this the first time she had acceded to, but also the very first that he had made this or any such suggestion. Her father had been one of 'Jack Dyneley's' chums in the days gone by, and had welcomed the son, on first meeting him after his return from Italy, with a cordiality partly due to the pleasant memories connected with the dead man, and partly prompted by the pleasant manners of his living representative. For a time, Mortimer, residing exclusively in town, could but rarely avail himself of invitations often and pressingly given; but when, upon taking up his quarters at Gracewood, he found himself but

ten short miles from the Priory, he had no excuse for not reciprocating such kind offers of hospitality. Still, for a time, he went but seldom. He took at first an instinctive though by no means intense dislike to the hostess, and did not find the host or his present circle particularly entertaining. He did not fail to be stricken, even on a first brief call, with the visible elegance of the daughter, though then but little turned of sixteen. But the interest excited by her appearance was not deepened or even maintained by the excessive supineness of her behaviour; and even when, after a longer acquaintance, he began to have some glimpse of how matters stood in that well-behaved establishment, he did not see enough to make him decide whether the silent passiveness of her conduct were wholly due to the active repression of her mother, or partly to her own lack of intelligence. A mere accident gave him the opportunity of solving a doubt which, it must be owned, had given him but little trouble. Indeed, he had come indolently to regret that a thing so fair should be so meaningless. But riding over one Sunday evening, some seven or eight months since, more to make up for

long negligence in calling than with any pleasant anticipations, he found Miss Chesterton just returned from Divine service and alone. Her papa and mamma, she said, had walked on with some friends from the church-door, and would doubtless be home shortly. Shortly, however, they did not return; and the good three quarters of an hour during which Mortimer awaited their advent gave him ample time to discover, without being told a word of, what he had once or twice been inclined to imagine, but had afterwards discarded as not proven and altogether improbable.

He now scarce knew at which to wonder more, whether the sweet timidity or the conversational ease, neither of which she had ever displayed when others were (as they had hitherto always been) hard by, but both of which she manifested now that there were no other eyes but his to encounter. Her expression of regret that her parents were not there to receive him, was evidently unaffected; but the gracious interest with which she listened, and the finished intelligence with which she replied, joined to the appropriate modesty of her looks and gestures, made it impossible for him to join his

regrets to hers; and when, after half-an-hour had elapsed they still did not appear, he could not resist the temptation of replying to her reiterated assurance of being sorry, by the frank assurance that he was not. It was quite evident that, though she was allowing herself to do her best to entertain him, she was troubled with the fear that she was quite incapable of doing so; and it was perhaps only by the pleasure she at last began to feel in listening to him, that she permitted herself to hope that he was not bored by talking to her. But her companion was not the man to be long charmed with a woman without, however unintentionally, letting her perceive it; and the courteous regard which she had excited in his manner, had succeeded in raising her self-esteem to a pleasurable height never before attained, when the shutting of a gate and approaching footsteps on the gravel sent it down to its usual moderate level.

You cannot give too much credit to people for honesty; you cannot give too little to them for sense. Only by confidence can you make and keep them straightforward; only by suspicious alarm can you guard against their stupidity.

Mrs. Thatchley was of a different opinion. She took as little precaution against folly as is usual with people who are not over-wise themselves; but if anybody ever deceived her, it was not because she ever wittingly gave them an opportunity. She controlled herself sufficiently for the moment, to be as civil to Mortimer as usual; but Isabelle, whose manner and speech on her arrival assumed their wonted reserve, was made that night to pay the sharp penalty of severe reproof, and ever after even the persistent penalty of increased supervision. The fact that the unexpected visitor had seen the young lady on the lawn as the servant opened him the garden gate, and had walked straight up to her without more ado, did not prevent the discharge of a domestic, or lessen the acerbity of Mrs. Thatchley's rebukes. To these last no answer was made, until the word 'indelicate' having been uttered with calm but cruel emphasis, the poor girl replied by leaving the room, and seeking in her own the poor consolation of maidenly tears. Nor did Mortimer fare very much better. For the nonce, as I said, Mrs. Thatchley was wontedly civil; but she was never again anything more. At last he had discovered a

reason beyond that of courtesy for visiting the Priory, but only by an incident which gave her reason to receive him with scarcely that. He had once been alone with Isabelle, and was henceforward mistrusted. How could she tell what had passed between them? She knew nothing, so imagined everything. She was completely in the dark, and therefore stumbled in her groping against every awkward possibility. Nearly an hour's freedom had been permitted to one whom she had ruled for twelve years with rigorous surveillance, and she would never forgive anybody who had part in the momentary emancipation. And so the servant who had answered the bell was dismissed: Mortimer had to ring it three times out of four without Mrs. Thatchley being at home; and on the fourth time, if he gained admittance, the chief object of his visit was sent to 'practise,' or kept out of the way on some trivial excuse if the father was present, and if he was not, on none. At first Mortimer was ready to believe the 'not at home' purely accidental; but the frequency of its occurrence, joined to the altered welcome even from Mr. Chesterton, when he *was* admitted, ended by con-

vincing him of the existence of design. Design could not have been more injudicious. It was scarcely probable that a young fellow who, Heaven knows, had mixed pretty freely with a fair number of accomplished women in his time, would have given very many thoughts to the agreeable impressions of an accidental interview, unless that interview were repeated under circumstances equally favourable. To have prevented this would perhaps have been wise, if we grant Mrs. Thatchley's views; but to guard rigidly against the chance of her daughter ever again being one moment alone with Mr. Dyneley, was too marked a proceeding not to be noticed by both; and could only succeed in giving to the one solitary and successful conversation a permanent importance which other *têtes-à-têtes*, shorter and not so happy, might have gradually removed. As it was, the more stupid Isabelle seemed, the more entertaining Mortimer felt convinced she could be; and after every dull call or laborious conversation, he only fell back upon the reminiscence of the one protracted commune, when words were nowise wanting, and their value was enhanced by youthful spontaneity. Till, at last, the

interview, which had made on him a pleasant, but by no means deep impression, grew by not being again repeated, but being sedulously prevented, into a matter of considerable importance; and after what Mrs. Thatchley deemed a six months' most successful defence, during which Dyneley had not entered the Priory gates above five times, and had each time been so encountered as to be convinced that he might enter five hundred without any chance of change in the mother's welcome or the daughter's demeanour, he came to consider himself as a sort of travelled Perseus, commissioned to liberate from domestic chains a most unfortunate Andromeda.

With his first positive step towards her emancipation we are already acquainted. But it is impossible to do more than divine the indefinite nothings which had induced Mortimer to take it, and given him the complete certainty that it would be successful. Without being the least conceited in such matters, he had been too great a favourite with the only people whose favour he would ever have thought of wanting, to be at all diffident in his address with women. Still

he was not the man to run the risk of a rebuff, just as he was not the man, if so rebuffed, to make a second trial. How then had he acquired the surety that, without a prior word on the subject, Miss Chesterton would accede to his request, or rather command, that she should ride at place and time of his appointment?

Ah! thou shrivelled duenna, love, and even that indefinable sentiment which is not yet love and will perhaps never become such, has an immaterial sense which waxes all the finer in proportion to the grossness of material obstacles. And, though I declare that nothing tangible or tellable had happened between them from that Sabbath eve seven or eight months ago till that hurried under-tone which we at least overheard, the one was no more surprised at the authoritative whisper than the other at the obedient response.

So that with a mixed sense of triumph over Mrs. Thatchley's machinery for the maintenance of a cool domestic despotism, of vengeance for all the tens of miles she had made him ride backwards and forwards for nothing, and of high moral responsi-

bility as the vindicator of maidenhood's right to reasonable liberty, he quietly awaited among his books on the lawn the announcement by a tidy but modest-looking little Phyllis that his horse stood caparisoned at the door.

CHAPTER III.

All the home counties are beautiful, and Alwoodley Chase is in one of them. It lies five miles the London side of Beadon Priory, and therefore fifteen from Gracewood. But Mortimer had covered too many hundred leagues on horseback in his continental wanderings, and was now far too satisfactorily mounted, to regret that he had not named a nearer rendezvous. He knew that, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Mr. Chesterton went up to town to attend the Board Meetings of a Charitable Trust which counted him among its directors, and that on those days alone was there any chance of his daughter being accompanied only by old Jeff. He knew further that the direction of her rides on these last occasions would be the subject of close inquiry, and that suspicion might be aroused in that vigilant breast at home if the direction were ever so little in that of his cottage.

More glorious English May morning never glistened over spring more complete. From wheat fields, green, young, and strong, from meadows turned by full-blazoned buttercups to gorgeous cloth of gold, lark followed lark up to heaven, in eddies of perpetual music. The cuckoo's alliterative call scarcely ever ceased in blossoming hedgerow or bright green copse. The lilacs were only just beginning to wear a slightly diminished glory, and the apple-bloom still lingered white-and-pink in orchards sheltered from the breeze. But the laburnum had hung out every available tassel, and the lanes were red and white for miles with the luscious incumbrance of intoxicating may. Fretfully anticipating its month not yet arrived, the wild rose here and there at distant intervals had broken into rebellious flower, herald of the profusion June held in store, when her gay forerunner's glories should have silently dropped away.

But these were now supreme; and on and on through their splendid territory rode delighted Mortimer, neither drawing rein nor urging spur. The dark bay filly knew her owner's pace, and never once slackened stride or hurried it; so that

two sharp hours brought them well up to the outskirts of the Chase.

He knew that he was all in good time; so he let the bridle hang loosely on her neck, as they quietly threaded the mazes of the redecorated woodland. Here and there were dark-brown peaty pools, and ever and anon interspaces overgrown with thriving bracken. The ground in some places was soft with last year's leaves and this year's rain, but for the most part was firm and even to the hoof as loiterer could desire. Right athwart the Chase was a broad, well cleared path, from which branched off interminable ways which none but those who knew the compass and were indifferent to stray boughs need attempt. Into these last, however, Mortimer advanced, but never too far to be out of hearing of a gallop along the first, nor to break out upon the rider whose advent the sound might possibly announce.

It is difficult to decide whether waiting for a person whom you do want to see, or for a person whom you do not, be the more provocative of impatience. But it seemed as if he had made up his mind to be kept expecting, without allowing

himself to be anxious. It was philosophic, and it was wise. He had himself named *two* days; and the answer he had received—the very best he could have anticipated—was only, 'If I can.' So that he quite recognized the possibility, which he tried (for the sake of his own ultimate comfort), but utterly failed (in the teeth of his wishes), to persuade himself was the probability, that she would not be able to come either day. He dismounted, seated himself on a mossy stump, drew from his pocket a tiny volume, and deceived himself into the idea that he was reading Petrarch's 'Trionfo d'Amore.' I should not like to be read with so little attention. He was awake to every sound, and mistook more than once a peripatetic donkey, and more than twice a gipsy's vagrant colt for the sound of the hoofs that, though it was getting on to two P. M., withal approached not. The less likely it became that the fair Amazon would ride that way, the more he pretended to be immersed in his book, but the more did he become the sport of every sound and motion. Well, he would stay till half-past two, and then he would go. He had said 'morning,' and morning was surely over. Still it was an in-

definite word; and as it was now half-past two, he would read (?) another 'capitolo,' and so while away the time till three. Surely that was a hoof? Not a bit of it. Hang it, then he would go. And he leaped into the saddle, and emerged into the broad grassy path, still to hear no warning stamp, but at any rate to see coming at gay speed along its right extremity something—then two somethings —which represented people on horseback, or the devil was in it. He broke into a gallop. Every second told. Horses, certainly. Riders too, now, for that matter. Yes, a lady's habit. And—a groom. And no other, clear as day, than Miss Chesterton and old Jeff.

Her eyes were fully as good as Mortimer's; and she checked the stride of her thorough-bred roan the moment that she recognized his approach. But though, when he was near enough for her to answer his lifted hat, lowered after continental fashion to his knee, with a slight but gracious inclination wholly English, the flanks of the brave young steed showed not the faintest symptoms of distress, yet the spume-flakes which dotted the martingale, and the glow which infused her countenance but to heighten

its charm, betrayed the pace at which five miles had just been annihilated. Her light-grey habit which Mrs. Thatchley had ordered because she imagined it to be quiet and more becoming a 'child,' but which only brought out more vividly the soft but consummated outline of the girlish form, fitted her like a sheath, and the graceful curves of her simple hat, whilst saving from the sun's invasion that delicate and precious complexion, left perfect freedom of display to the rival lustre of her golden hair.

'So delighted to have met you,' Mortimer began at once, avoiding with prepared tact any allusion to her evidently having ridden fast or to the long ordeal of waiting through which he had gone—for this would have implied an appointment which it was now more delicate to ignore. 'So delighted to have met you. See how diligently I was employed!' And he held out the pocket volume. 'I was reading Petrarch. You know Italian?'

'Just a little.'

'Then you should read his "Canzoni." These sunny days, you see, send me to the sweet southern tongue, and bring back all my southern memories.

At least, when I am alone. Now, I can forget both.'

'It is only when we are present, then, Mr. Dyneley, that we poor English have a chance of being remembered.'

'Were your conclusion,' he answered, charmed with the intelligence of her rapid reply, 'as true as it is skilful, you at least ought to be but rarely in my mind. You have the best of the argument, but—'

'No—if I have it, let me keep it. I triumph so seldom. That little book, I doubt not, is a charming companion for quiet summer days; but, do you know, you must not interfere with my reading. I followed your last recommendation; but had not got through half of the "Pot of Basil," before I was bidden to replace it in the library.'

He uttered a slight sound of impatience, but only gave articulate utterance to a quiet 'I suppose so.' Immediately, he continued, 'It must be eight months, or nearly, since I recommended you to read Keats, or had the opportunity of recommending you to read or do anything. My visits at the Priory have sunk into a form, and pardon my frankness if I add, into a very stupid one.'

'*Que faire?*' she answered, with a pretty laugh and an almost imperceptible shrug of her graceful shoulders. 'I would *try* to amuse you, if I—well, yes—if I dare. But would you not rather see me silent'—and again she gave a tiny laugh—'than snubbed? I am not fond of being crushed; are you?'

'I never am,' he answered swiftly and savagely. 'But pardon my rough reply; I do not for one moment mean to accuse you of weakness, or of anything else indeed. That you are not *stupid*, I once had an opportunity of judging; since then, I have never had, and it would seem never again am to have, an opportunity of judging of anything concerning you. Yet that one occasion, combined with the constant care taken against its repetition, assisted me to form a pretty strong, if not a sound conclusion, Miss Chesterton, as to your entire position.'

'Do you envy it?'

'I profoundly commiserate it.' He placed his bridle-hand heavily on her pommel. 'May I be very frank?'

'As frank as ever you like.'

'As frank as elder brother, or friend from the cradle?'

'Am I likely to refuse such an offer?' she said, with a tinge of sadness in her clear soft voice. 'I shall never have the first; and the second or anything resembling it I have begun to despair of meeting. You will have difficulty in saying anything frank,—since I am sure it will, even if severe, be kindly meant,—for which I shall not be grateful.'

'I was going to ask a question.'

'Ask it, Mr. Dyneley,' she said quietly.

'How much do you love your—mother?'

'Not at all.'

'And your father?'

'Oh! boundlessly.'

'Do you care for anybody else?'

'Yes;' and she raised her riding-whip and pointed over her shoulder. 'For Jeff.'

'Poverina!' It was better than 'poor child' in blunt English, and she equally understood it. There was silence, save the sound of the quiet hoofs on the soft turf and the jingle of bits when the horses brought their nostrils lovingly together. She was the first to speak.

'Do you want me to tell you more, Mr. Dyneley, than you have asked? You are so kind that, if you wish it, I will.'

'Tell me, please.'

'Yet what shall I tell you? How much, or how little? Of a childhood all tears, and a girlhood all suppression? Of a spirit that would not be subdued, because too young and high to calculate the chances of successful resistance? Or of a sense that, coming at last, but even then premature, feigned a submission for peace's sake, which has at last become a habit? Is not that enough? And yet is it, after all, more than you had already discerned?'

'Nor more, nor less,' he answered, bitterly. 'I know enough of your past, and do not want you to inflict torture on me by unnecessarily relating your own. But may my frankness extend to your future?'

'It really had not occurred to me, I declare'—again she laughed, though sweetly—'that I had one.'

'Have your made up your mind, then, to go on submitting to the end, be the end what it may?'

'Yes.'

'In everything?'

She did not answer, as before, all at once; but when she did, the answer was—

'In everything.'

Again there was a pause; but this time he was the first to break it.

'You make no exception. Yet, perhaps, you would make it if I named it. Remember—I was to be as frank as ever I liked.'

'Quite so.'

'Then, making no exception to your law of submission in everything, you will marry according to order?'

'Never!' she broke out vehemently, and without a second's hesitation. 'I will never marry where I do not love!'

The fleeciest of summer cloudlets momentarily netted the sun, which instantly regained its freedom. But brief as had been the cold obstruction, the beechen leaves had shivered and the roan started at their sudden emotion. Her hand was as light as her seat was firm; and no more than Mortimer did she notice the trivial occurrence. But the days were coming when the shudder of those beechen leaves and the swerve of her sensitive steed would

haunt *her* ears at least, and set *her* limbs at least a-tremble with a cruel iteration never to be exorcised. But now she only continued in a tone so trenchant, though still subdued, that you would have thought the words were issuing from his lips, not hers:—

'See, Mr. Dyneley; it was not necessary—perhaps it would have been difficult, or possibly unbecoming—for me to name this one only exception which you, however, were fully justified, by my glad concession to you of frankness, to extort. But do not doubt that I have long since asked myself every question which you can ask upon the subject. After years of young, stubborn, unreasoning resistance I gave in, or seemed to give in, to a will more powerful than mine. Not more powerful because it is stronger, but because it is—as mine is not—wholly indifferent to peace. We may do tolerably without many things in life, but calm grace is necessary for mine.'

He started, as well he might start. She was the first person that had told him, however unintentionally and unconsciously, his own secret. In exposing what she imagined was her own predominant disease,

she had most certainly declared his. He felt that he knew himself better after that brief epitome of the 'necessaries of life.'

'Yet,' she went on, not regarding his stare of curious admiration, 'though the grace may possibly still be retained, the calmness will have to go if the challenge extends to compulsory marriage. Till then I will not even skirmish. If it comes to that, I will fight to the death.'

'It *will* come,' he said, slowly.

'It will be time to talk further of it when it does. I thank you, Mr. Dyneley, immensely; but, for the present, we have said enough.'

He raised his hat.

'Your wish is sufficient, your gratitude unmerited. But if imaginary obligation—for from you to me there can never henceforward be a real one—be not too burdensome for your generosity to bear, should you ever want fidelity at need, I will go through all the elements to serve you.'

She looked at him hard, and then replied, 'I believe you.'

Again there was silence. It was scarcely wonderful. At length he stretched out his right arm,

and extending his chest, let the hand drop again to his side, and said,—

'God knows I never wittingly tempted man or woman ever so slightly astray from duty. In coming here this day my conscience more than acquits me. But conscience cannot be vicarious; and if yours, Miss Chesterton, upbraids you, do not repeat what *you* do not approve.'

'I feel fully justified.'

'I am glad of it. And you have doubtless been accused wrongly so long and so often that you must necessarily have come to have either a very fine moral sense or none at all. That you have the first I am certain, and I am consoled in having it, in this matter, as the endorser of mine. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I shall often be here. The rest I leave to your wishes, your judgment, and your convenience.'

'Thanks. Now I must say Good-bye.'

'Good-bye. But won't you take Petrarch?'

'Where would be the use? My very pillow is not sacred from search. No. Good-bye.

She gave her little hand, and lightly bounded away. Jeff, touching his hat, trotted rapidly after,

and Mortimer was left to fifteen miles of solitary, but not altogether unsatisfactory, reflection.

The day ended as it had begun, in song and sunshine; but the full May-moon permitted no regret that its glories had graciously yielded to the softer supremacy of night. The last puff of the last after-dinner cigar trailed away among the foliage; and Gracewood's young lord strolled leisurely across the grass-plat, under the arch of yellow motionless laburnums, through the wicket-gate into the deep moist grass of the just deflowered orchard, and sat himself musingly on the stile at its extremity. Around him were woods and meadows; above him, the liquid heaven; below him, was his snugly-nestled home. At distant intervals the corn-crake croaked sharp in some neighbouring field, and occasionally a big white owl would startle the air; but the long silvery flow, followed by the short quick ripple, of the nightingale's lament, never for an instant ceased. It was not a night to be alone. Society would have been an injury, if not an insult; but Mortimer would not have been of your flesh and blood or mine, if at such a moment he had not felt the necessity for 'another.'

He had never yet loved, and he did not love now. Older here at twenty-four, in almost every social experience than the more experienced usually become at forty, and the less experienced ever become at all, he was in genuine amorous sentiment as fresh as Hylas himself. What we may still be permitted, since forced by the forms of language, to call accident, now that it is recognized that in an orderly universe the accidental has no place, prevented him from knowing the higher, since the purer and more profiting, phases of passion; but his taste had secured him against any prolonged acquaintance with the lower. He had met, and in a certain sense known, the most daring and dazzling of the softer sinners; but the only women who would have led him into degradation were the very women who could not lead him at all; and if, as I need not deny, his name had been mixed up, since his hours had been mingled, with the prominently frail of that southern land whose shores are yet hugged by syrens, it was that his ears needed not the wax requisite to save the more vulgar mariner, but that, like Ulysses, he could securely cling to the mast of his uncompromising

instincts. There was much in them to lure, but at least as much to warn and disenchant him; and though he did not refuse them an appreciable share of his hours of leisure, they ever after looked back to his fastidious companionship as a sort of purified pause and consolatory reminiscence in the thoughtless rush of their profligate lives. He had tasted frugally of their best; their worst he had wholly passed by. The beauty of their forms, the courtliness of their array, the sportive peril never ending in disaster of their athletic conversation, he had enjoyed to the full. Nor, perhaps, would it be just to say that he was dead to their admiration or indifferent to their esteem; but he left unreservedly to others their Dead-sea apples, their compulsory venality, their unhappy rivalries, their evanescent hunger, and their never-dying hate. He had no vermin's taste for plunging and wallowing in their deep though well-hidden mud. Swallow-like, he had only skimmed their beautiful bright surface, to mount up higher after the swoop; so that now, when we know him, without being in the slightest degree *blasé*, he was bitterly bad to please.

Heaven help the man, especially in these latter

days, who has become immoderately fastidious without ceasing to be moderately virtuous. A good career of vice would leave him so enamoured of rectitude that innocence, even though ungarnished, might possibly be mistaken for an accomplishment. But what satisfaction can be found for him who, though he will leave his garment in the hands of the wife of Potiphar, cannot bring himself to spread his coverlet over the feet of Ruth? What avails it him to be able to resist the voluptuous limbs and glozing speeches of the imperial adulteress, if he cannot reconcile himself to the labour-roughened palms and gentile provincialisms of the unsophisticated Moabite? In vain will the modern Noemi instruct her child to wash herself and anoint her and put on her best attire. The obedient devices of the simple daughter of the Ephrathite mother leave him as utterly unmoved as the unprompted solicitations of the lustful Egyptian.

So through all last year's London season and so much of this as he had been compelled to endure, together with autumn experiences at the seaside and winter experiences in country-houses, he had passed as unscathed as through Lombard salons,

Tyrrhenian palaces, and Tuscan villas. He had not met since his return a single woman, old or young, handsome or deformed, who had excited in him any the slightest personal or permanent impersonal interest. Not till now.

And now! He was intensely interested; but whether personally or impersonally, it would be hasty to decide. It would be to do for him far more than it entered into his head to do for himself. One thing, however, was clear. He might not dote on the daughter, but he now certainly detested the so-called mother. She had herself to thank. Even Isabelle's almost divine beauty would have failed to take much hold of Mortimer, if to it had not been superadded the fascination of a thoroughly human interest. Twenty minutes' dullness would have sufficed to outweigh her looks, if twenty months' experience, culminating in this morning's complete avowal of her position, had not occurred to more than readjust the balance; and if the days of chivalry have really passed away, let us try to hope that it is more because dungeons and dragons have become rare than because swords and arms have become craven. But here was an ugly monster vomiting domestic

fire and brimstone, and there a piteous fair maiden shoved into as dreary an oubliette as storier ever wot of. And shall no lance be lifted? If so, it is high time that 'Audax omnia perpeti' be erased from Mortimer's fierce escutcheon.

So not knowing exactly how he was going to help, but convinced that a little light skirmishing would enable him at any rate to become better acquainted with the enemy's position, he might have been seen on the following Tuesday and Thursday, now loitering in the broad grassy path, and now exploring the umbrageous intricacies, of Alwoodley Chase. But by Miss Chesterton, at least, he was not seen; and another week of fidelity met with only virtue's proverbial reward. Still she came not. The same light fare being repeated yet one day more, the cavalier became impatient. As he had ridden thirty miles five times to no purpose, he thought he had better try to do something with the fifteen that yet remained to him this morning and call at Beadon Priory on his way home. He had not been there since the day preceding that of the woodland meeting; and as that was now nearly three weeks ago, he thought he could call with decency, though the

odds were that he would not be admitted. Mrs. Thatchley, however, was 'at home.' She came into the drawing-room in a rough, thick dressing-gown that made Mortimer's flesh creep, praying excuse for it on the score of her having 'been busy packing.'

'Certainly. Are you going up to town, then, for a few days?'

'O dear, no! My brother'—she always called him her brother, as if there had been a doubt about it—'My brother does not care for London, and I consider it a very worldly trivial place; besides Isabelle is too young to see anything of it yet. We are going to Wales.'

'Really! For any length of time?'

'No; for four or five weeks, perhaps. We are going to visit some relations of mine there. I have been dreadfully busy; but as we were going away, of course I came down to see you to say good-bye, knowing you would pardon my costume. I am sure you will excuse Isabelle's doing so; she is very much occupied with preparing her own things. My brother has gone up to town to a Meeting.'

And so on; and so on.

It was quite evident to Mortimer that if he sat on the ottoman till the crack of doom, his eyes would be regaled that day with nothing more refreshing than Mrs. Thatchley in her he-did-not-know-what-material dressing-gown. So outwardly wishing her a pleasant journey to Wales, but inwardly wishing her an unpleasant one to another celebrated principality, he bade her adieu, vaulted into the saddle, and galloped off to Gracewood. One thing he thought was clear,—the meeting in the Chase, though not repeated, had not been mentioned or discovered. As for anything else, conjecture was unwise, since it might be mistaken, and must be barren. How much had he taken by his skirmishing?

So the stock-doves coo, and the woodbine deftly climbs in Alwoodley; but the stride of the roan smites not the short soft turf, and the eye of the dark bay filly looks aside in vain for the proud arched neck she has not, withal, forgotten.

CHAPTER IV.

The sun is down, but much of the light and all of the heat of day still linger in the London streets. Omnibuses are fewer, and cabs are not so many, on the hard rough thoroughfare; but though hours of business are long since over, and the legs of householders are mostly stretched under stout mahogany or on reposeful hearth, the pavement seems busy almost as at noon. The crowd of these later hours, however, is pleasanter to look on, especially in that most picturesque and interesting of London ways, the very Via Sacra of the English capital, the historic and still dramatic Strand. Not even the dog-days balk these lively Metropolitans of their Thespian amusements, and the dog-days have not yet come; so they hold small congresses, while the clock of St. Clement's or St. Martin's has not yet stricken nine, debating which theatre shall be patronized by their favour, when half-price shall

have tolled. Their decision and disappearance slightly thin the street. But that prettiest proletariate, the London milliner, that the world has ever seen, still maintains the reputation of the busiest city in Europe. Most of them are homewards bent, some merely loitering for the sake of the urban summer night; but all are natty, and quick-eyed and comely, and alive to modest coquetry; many, fresh and bonnie as dog-roses in the lanes. None are slatternly; and few, very few, bear the marks of excessive toil or mercenary degradation. Blessings on you, hard-working, lively little maidens! for your trim figures and expressive eyes have often and often made cheerier, trudging of mine along that pictorial highway, in the pleasant youth now almost passed away.

I think they were the only things Mortimer admired in the whole of London. He knew that they worked, and they always seemed sprightly and happy, and I cannot help fancying that the fact of the Strand being their greatest haunt and thoroughfare had unconsciously decided him in his original choice of rooms. The Temple precincts were quiet and semi-secluded; but, for him, they were terribly

out of the way. And chambers further west would have probably been his London home, had it not been for faces on the road, and for Grattan Horncastle, at whose oak he is now impatiently thundering.

But all the hammers of Thor would not have made the tenant of the fourth floor right, 6, Escheat Court, Temple, open to their knocks, before he had surveyed from his invisible watch-tower the person of the boisterous invader.

'All right, old boy!' came from somewhere; and a few seconds later, the lightest of keys opened the heaviest of doors and admitted Mortimer. The cheeriest welcome followed.

'Delighted to see you, my dear fellow. I thought you were never coming. I got your letters. Many thanks. I will tell you all about it.' He lowered his voice, as they proceeded along the passage. 'Not just yet. Bracebridge is here. Mum before him.' Then, resuming his former tone. 'Come along. Just in time for some supper.'

'Hallo! Dyneley! how are you? I began to think you were dead and buried. What game are

you up to in Woodlandshire? O yes. Fine country, flowers, cucumbers, and that sort of thing. All right. We understand, don't we, Horncastle? Ha! you fellows who've lived in Italy know how the trick ought to be done. I expect there's a mighty lot of heiresses down in your parts, and smaller game to go on with.' And so rattled on the best and unluckiest fellow that could never manage to square matters with, as he thought impracticable, and to him certainly most inexorable, Fortune.

Guy Bracebridge's father had hunted, fought, and drunk in the days when hunting was fiercer and fighting and drinking were more fashionable than now. He still survived, though he was rarely heard of except in Guy's mouth as 'that fool, my father.' The accusation, not bitterly uttered and not unkindly meant, was at least wholly true. A bigger fool never squandered a fortune, at no time sufficiently large to prompt or palliate a reckless prodigality. Poor devil! he did not know he was spending it until it was spent. His eldest son, who, in this case with unmistakable bitterness and no touch of kindness, but with more than equal truth,

was always alluded to by Guy as 'that scoundrel my brother,' had probably made away with most of it. The three younger brothers had from childhood upwards always ridden such thunderingly good flesh, and drunk such thunderingly good claret, that they imagined themselves great swells accordingly, and fully provided for by the excellent gods. Luckily, one of them was drowned in a salmon stream, and another's neck was broken and life hurried away over a brutal stone wall that would not give and could not be cleared. And Guy, alone of the three, arrived at the end of boyhood to discover that nothing remained for him but university and work. He went to college, knowing literally nothing except how to make himself popular without trying. This excessive popularity got him rusticated at Oxford, plucked at Cambridge, and considerable worthless experience at Bonn. On his return from Germany, he obtained, through the influence of the county member, a clerkship in a Government office, and through the same instrumentality, a better appointment in the commissariat accompanying one of our ever-recurring eastern expeditions. This last was soon

over; and Bracebridge returned to find his patron's seat vacated by death, and his former clerkship filled up. Thrown again on his own resources, he was almost glad to hear that his father had entered upon a Chancery suit, by which most of his property was to be recovered, and that as the suit would be likely to last some time, he was to enter at Lincoln's Inn, and get called to the Bar before this splendid chance of business passed away. He kept his first term. A decision was obtained in his father's favour. Four more terms had been kept. A fresh decision, scarcely so favourable, was given; and the other side offered a compromise. Mr. Bracebridge was urged, by his leading counsel, on no account to accept it. Guy had completed his second year of probation, but was doomed not to hold his first brief in the great family suit. That, however, was a small matter, if the case were won. It came on for final hearing before the House of Lords. In the meantime the leading counsel, who had scouted all notion of compromise, had been raised to the woolsack, and Guy was dead certain what the decision must be. Imagine his horror, when his lordship decided for the other side, against

which he had originally been employed as advocate, and from whom he would hear of no offer of compromise, and concluded his judgment with the remark that the claim was so preposterous, it ought never to have been made. Such was Guy Bracebridge's story, at least; an extraordinary one, as indeed were all his stories. At any rate, he was never known to lie. The explanation is probably to be found in the fact that, though he was incapable of wittingly telling the wrong story, he was almost equally incapable of getting hold of the right one. The result was, that his father had to scrape together every tangible shilling in order to pay the costs, and had not a farthing left wherewith to continue Guy's legal education. A couple of hundred pounds would have sufficed for as much of this as tender-hearted benchers used then to require, *viz.* to pay his call fees, and for as many dinners as remained to be eaten. Those dinners had never been eaten to this day. Old Bracebridge kept up as decent an establishment as he could for himself and for his daughter, whom he was too selfish to allow to marry, though too poor to make really comfortable. And Guy was given to understand

that, now everything had fallen to pieces, he must light on his legs as best he might. Then it was that he became the London nondescript he had since remained. He gave up society altogether, protesting that he could not possibly keep it up.

'Poor men,' he would say, 'cannot afford to be economical. I cannot afford to be seen in bad clothes, and I cannot afford to pay for good ones. The name of that scoundrel, my brother, is on the back of so much paper, that I don't think there's a tradesman in London would give me any credit worth having; and if they did, egad! I don't see how they would ever get paid.' Here a laugh by no means saturnine or cynical, but as straight from the heart as if not the speaker but quite somebody else were alluded to. 'They are not such fools, I can tell you. And if they were—which they are not'—(for poor Guy, being substantially the most illogical talker in the world, thought it necessary to be what he thought most precisely and reiteratively logical in form)—'and if they were—which they are not—no, and it would be very funny if they were—very funny—which they are not—where

would be the use? Where would be the use, I say?' By this time he would have got lashed up to his work, gesticulated freely, got dry about the lips, and altogether conducted himself as though his assertions had been contradicted. 'Use! Not a bit of it! Why, I know those fellows well enough—aye, and the women, too. They don't like to be seen talking with a man, no matter who he is, unless he's well got up, and that sort of thing. There are those Culletons that my father wouldn't have had in his house—wretched people—and if I wanted to know them—which I don't, mind you—which I don't—if I did, I say, they'd cut me, or like to cut me—*like* to cut me at any rate. But they're not going to get the chance; for I haven't got a coat to go anywhere where I should be likely to meet them.' And again he laughed, as though it were the best joke in the world. And certainly his declamatory bonhomie made it exceedingly humorous.

It must not be supposed from this that he went about out at elbows, a forsaken vagabond. The man was well enough dressed, and from the *os frontis* to the tendon Achilles looked what he was, of old

blood, old and done for if you like, but old for all that. He was a gentleman and a good fellow, and ridiculously frank; and all three were discoverable in five minutes. How he made the 150*l.* or so on which he lived, it is impossible to define more precisely than by saying that he made it out of newspapers and journals; but the publications for which he worked, and the kind of labour he did for them, varied from day to day. He himself never varied; he was always grumbling and always jolly. A confirmed croaker, regarding and proclaiming himself as 'the unluckiest beggar that ever was,' he had at any rate the inexhaustible fortune of the highest social spirits. He would tell you such a string of woes as you never heard of before, and you would come away with the impression of having had the most lively and chirpy conversation of your life. He, too, resided in the Inn; but, unlike Horncastle, never by any chance sported oak. He was hail-fellow-well-met with everybody, and was only too glad when anybody turned up. When nobody came or was to be found, he would sing a very old and melancholy English ditty in a very loud and lamentably flat voice, accompanying himself with

one thumb on a piano that must have been housed in Noah's ark. As for his duns, they might come as often as ever they pleased. If Guy were in luck and feather, he would give them a glass of Cock sherry and a merry-sad story; were he in bad luck or bothered, he would threaten to kick them downstairs this time, and never pay them at all if they came another. They knew their man well enough. His accounts were small, but always paid eventually. They had no fears of his honesty; and as long as they did not give excessive tether to his capacity, were aware that they were all right. From Mortimer he borrowed small sums for short periods over and over again; but he invariably repaid them to the day. He would have sold himself into slavery sooner than, in such a matter, have failed of his word.

Mortimer thoroughly enjoyed his friendly chaff, and freely chaffed him in return.

'It's all very well to pretend envy of my rural lot; but I think I know pretty accurately where the fleshpots are. They used to be in Egypt, not in the wilderness; and I question if the "cover" be altered. Had there been anything in the

country worth your having, you would have been down to see me long ago.'

'Down to see you! That's good. You're too far off for a walk, and I can't go to you any other way; or I should have looked you up before now. But I say, old fellow, you ought to be in town more than you are.'

'Of course he ought,' put in Horncastle, boisterously, but, like the other, in thorough earnest. 'Never was there a fellow with such a chance.'

'By Jove! if *I* had such a chance—yes, or anything like such a chance—wouldn't I stick to it? Why now, how much has your cousin got?'

Remember that these men—the oldest (Bracebridge) of whom was thirty, the youngest (Mortimer) twenty-four—the most cordial friends possible, were together and alone.

'Oh, perhaps ten thousand a-year?'

'Yes; and more. Fifteen—twenty—everybody says so.' Bracebridge had the completest confidence in 'everybody.' 'And why shouldn't you have it? Well, of course you'll have it, or ought to have it. Ought to have it, I say; and you will, if you're not a d—d fool. But you ought to go there more, old

boy, instead of sticking in the country. I know it's very pleasant; *I* know all that. But then—By Jove! if I had such a chance, which I might have had if that ruffian'—(and he named the then Lord Chancellor, who had been his father's counsel, and whose virtues are now engraven on marble in the great Abbey)—'if that ruffian hadn't—'

Horncastle knew what was coming; he had had it all over again once before that evening, for the fifty-seventh time; so he shouted:

'Supper, gentlemen! supper! Every delicacy from every zone. What do you say, my dear fellow? lobster or sardines?' And in offering an alternative, he had named every one of the boasted delicacies. 'Sardines from the tideless sea, and the noble crawfish from our beloved native shores. Brown bread of the Patent-unadulterated-never-grow-stale Company, and butter equal to that of Woodlandshire. The wines are not numerous, as you perceive; but the beer is from the immortal Prosser's, and is abundant.'

'The scoundrel! Prosser. Um! Prosser; I think I settled that fellow for a time this afternoon.' And Bracebridge deftly scooped out as he spoke

the contents of a claw. 'Will you believe it? it's five years since I first went to that fellow, and I've paid him about a fourth of my income—which certainly is not large—but a fourth, a fourth.' He generally paused a moment after what he thought an important repetition. 'A fourth! Well—if he didn't positively refuse to send in anything more if I did not pay his bill; as if I hadn't paid his bill thousands of times. Not that particular one, perhaps—indeed, certainly—but any amount of others.'

'And what did you say?' asked Mortimer, making believe to eat.

'Say? Well, I just told him that, so long as he refused to send in what I ordered, so long would I not pay him at all; and even if he did send in what I ordered, I should just keep him waiting three months more than I otherwise should have kept him, for his cursed impudence.'

It was said with the most earnest joviality; but it was all meant, and it was done pretty much as he declared it should be. Guy Bracebridge never told a tradesman he would pay him, if he did not mean to do so; and for three months there were

further supplies, but no further applications for a little money, from *one* of his duns.

The best fellows in the world may sometimes be in the way; and it was a great relief to Horncastle when Bracebridge announced that he was forced to go. The former had much to say to Mortimer, of which he had no intention of saying a word until the two were alone. Discretion was not one of poor Guy's virtues; and the frankness which he manifested in speaking of his own unimportant concerns, he extended to the graver affairs of his friends. It really was not his fault; he trusted everybody, and so had no secrets. The moment the outer door sounded after his descending footsteps, Mortimer asked at once:

'Well, what news?'

'Everything is arranged. I feel so sure of success that I shall start to-morrow for Veerborough, and commence my personal canvass. I will leave in your hands a written resignation of my clerkship (I have got three weeks' leave), and will write and ask you to hand it in the moment that I feel absolutely certain of winning.'

'Well, Grattan, you ought to know best; but all

I can say is, that, if you get in, it is very wonderful. It is a touch-and-go business for you. The place has always been held by a Conservative; you have not an atom of interest in the town; and whatever I may think of your abilities, not a soul there, and precious few people anywhere else, have ever heard of your existence.'

'All very true, my dear fellow; but then, as I have told you before—'

'Then we won't discuss it. If you have finally made up your mind to try, it is no use my reiterating objections which I dare say you are already tired of. You know I wish you good luck, whatever may be my fears.'

'Of course I do; and you know that I never undervalue your objections or your advice. I only wish you would care more for mine. Now, why don't you stand, too? You would be sure to get in.'

'For where? I should like to know.'

'For heaps of places.'

'And by what means?'

'By your cousin's influence and money.'

'My dear Grattan, the only influence and money

which he would expend in my favour to forward such a scheme, would be clogged with a condition I will not hear of. I think I am sufficiently tolerant of other folk's opinions, but I shall retain my own. Plainly, I will, neither now nor ever, contest any place except on Conservative principles.'

'Oh! my dear fellow! What nonsense! Don't you see how parties are disorganized? Have you not often said that every side is partially wrong in thinking itself wholly right, and that political motion, like every other, is the resultant of conflicting forces, each of which influences the direction?'

'And I say it again, just as I say that it is necessary for a good football-match that the ball should be kicked each way; but the same man must not kick both ways indiscriminately. And I will not kick your way, whether you call it the Whig way or the Radical way.'

'Hang it! I know you'll be getting some rascally diplomatic appointment, and off you will go to the Continent again, and we shall see no more of you. You who ought to remain here and be one of the men of your time. There's no earthly reason why

you should not, with your head and your backing, be a Secretary of State in ten years, and anything else you like in ten more.'

'Except my unfortunate Conservative opinions, old boy.'

'But Mr. Dyneley is not at all a violent partisan, and has, to my knowledge, offended his own side by his recent lukewarmness.'

'True; but for all that, you cannot expect a man to be so regardless of consistency, indeed of decency, as to be seen standing for one place on the Whig interest, and supporting his cousin, who stands on the Tory interest, in another.'

'Oh, with a little management, it could be done. Why need you declare your opinions so unmistakably? Once in the House, you could choose your side; and it would soon be forgotton by whose influence you got there.'

'No use; no use, Grattan; so you need not try. You will have to make me more ambitious than I am—and I could probably be more ambitious than even you imagine—before I can consent to make a wrong start; and such would be the start which you recommend. No! go in and win. I will watch

your *management*. I shall have the benefit of your attempt.'

More to the same purpose followed; but the arguments, continued deep into the night, were of a similar colour to those hitherto adduced, and the answers were just as decisive, simple, and peremptory as their predecessors. A listener would have had abundance of material for forming an estimate of the character of the two speakers. That estimate would have contained a most remarkable contrast. On the one hand was the order-loving, principle-seizing, direct-looking mind of Mortimer Dyneley, with which we have already some tolerable acquaintance. On the other was a mental and moral structure, not lightly to be passed over in a story in which its influence will be so deeply felt.

Grattan Horncastle passed for an Englishman, but his parentage was unquestionably Scotch. Of his relations nobody in London ever heard, but as long as a man remains a bachelor, even the most vulgar people in London are not very curious. He held an appointment in the Waste Paper Office, with a salary of some 140*l*. per annum, yearly increasing at the rate of ten pounds, and lived

quietly in the Temple, known by everybody in it as a young fellow (of seven-and-twenty) with infinite tact, splendid health and spirits, and a temper never off its guard. In argument, for which he was always ready, let people be as rude as they might, he never ceased to display an unmovable courtesy. Withal he was a most provoking antagonist; not so much by reason of his perfect self-command—though to some, of course, *that* was a great cause of irritation—as by his thorough acquaintance with, and the use which he made of, the details of every subject which he thought fit to discuss. No matter how just might be the principles propounded, or how philosophic the ends sought by his opponent, one slip in a matter of fact was seized on and exposed, and pressed home at once with ruthless urbanity. He literally bristled with facts; and he used them so determinedly that many a listener went away impressed with the feeling that he could have used them to support an opposite view if he wished, and some with the impression that he would so have used them had it served his purpose. In addition to this excellent memory and curiosity of research, must be added an indefatigable but exceedingly peculiar

activity. It was not like the activity of any other energetic man. It was not restless, nor laborious, nor intermittent. It was quiet, constant, and apparently unaccompanied by effort. He had not an atom of genius—except for always doing something. Had he been thrown on the shore of a desert island he would have counted the pebbles and registered their shapes and colours, not with any idea of arriving at a valuable conclusion, or inducing a law, but partly from the habit of occupation, and partly from the habit of regarding any *fact* as likely to turn out useful. He had made himself acquainted with the latest enumeration of phenomena accepted by scientific men; but he never troubled himself about their conclusions. Facts of themselves led him nowhere; but he was ready to marshal them at a moment's notice, and lead *them* anywhere. Look at his room! It is a perfect chaos! The books are tumbled about on dirty broken-legged tables, and the semi-carpeted floor is literally a foot deep in papers, pamphlets, and blue-books; but he can go to any passage, put his finger on any speech, and turn to any table of figures he wants. Contradict him on some point, and he will make a dive

into that dense pool of print and draw out immediately some passage or other and controvert you on the spot with an authority, while you have not at hand, and could not for your life find in a fortnight, any other authority in your favour. His hair and dress are as disorderly as his room ; but he can put the former into a show of neatness in two minutes. He is scrupulously clean, and seems brimming over with fine health. He can live on the plainest or even coarsest fare, and can equally eat, but does not any more enjoy, the richest. He has no ear for music, no judgment in pictures, no palate, no taste of any kind. But if you know anything of your species, you will go away and consider him the cleverest man without genius you ever met, or are ever likely to meet. For Mortimer, his society had a fascination greater than that of all other people. Horncastle's splendid animal spirits and independent moral courage undoubtedly exercised their charm ; but it is in accordance with the result of common experience to believe that other qualities, more useful though more dangerous, omitted from or not cultivated in Mortimer's nature, gratified him in his friend. The mental characteristics of the two, if

combined in one brain, would have equipped a perfect man. It is difficult to say which of the two, not perfected by the other, was the more incomplete. But they were doomed never to coalesce; for circumstances, superadded to tendency, will only still more determine their divergence.

CHAPTER V.

After five successive years of blundering financial legislation, steadily represented by five successive years of financial deficits, the Whigs under the premiership of Lord Melbourne, had been defeated on the Budget. But it was not the misfortunes of their Chancellor of the Exchequer alone that had brought them into disrepute; nor could Mr. Baring be made the scapegoat of a cabinet. Nine years of penitential opposition had been the punishment justly inflicted on the Tory party, for refusing to pass a Reform Bill. It seemed as though nine years were to be the limit of Whig triumph for having passed a wrong one. They had been playing the first rounds of a game, which is now nearly played out. They then exceeded their Radical friends in number and power far more than they can boast to do now; but though they had not as yet admitted these into alliance, they had courted co-operation

and coquetted for support. They had obtained both at the expense of their character, and, it now appeared, probably of their supremacy. A general election would help to solve the problem.

It was the summer of 1841. It was thirsty weather both for canvassers and voters, and the electioneering tap was freely turned on. It was a land flowing with beer and money. We were not so virtuous then as now; and failed to detect corruption in a brass band, or treating in the questionable grammar of an emblazoned banner. Ribbons were very dear, and drums very noisy. Every natural law was outraged. Teapots brought forth monsters, and attorneys positively assisted their neighbours.

Grattan Horncastle was in the thick of it, and had written Mortimer to hand in at once to the chief of the Waste Paper Office, the resignation of his clerkship. Mortimer could but obey. He was not, however, any the less lost in wonder. No man could have been ordinarily less curious about the private concerns of his neighbours; and no man ever more completely restrained his curiosity when aroused by some extraordinary occurrence to an

unwonted pitch of interest; but it would have been strange indeed if Horncastle's conduct had not excited his marvel. As far as he could form an opinion, his friend had no income beyond that accruing from his government appointment; and this he was abandoning, as he was of course forced to do, before he could be elected a Member of Parliament. Of his relations he had barely ever spoken: indeed, Mortimer did not quite know where they lived. He had apparently no intimate friend even as well off as Mortimer himself; and with Mortimer's small income, and that too an allowance, Horncastle was thoroughly acquainted. He had taken pains to disclaim, though without the slightest provocation, any promises of financial support from the agents of the Whig party. The disclaimer, all the more because it was spontaneous and unnecessary, Mortimer could not entirely believe; but even supposing, what was highly improbable, that the party would defray the whole of his electioneering expenses, how was he to live if he got into the House? And equally so, how was he to live if he did not? His clerkship, of course, could not be resumed: that would have gone for

ever. The more the matter was turned over, the more incomprehensible it seemed.

Guy Bracebridge had now, in common with the rest of the world, become aware of his friend's extraordinary move. Naturally enough, he was hurt, and perhaps annoyed, that Horncastle should have kept from his knowledge so important a secret. Of Horncastle's affairs, he knew about as much, or as little as Mortimer; and between them a discussion of the subject was now both reasonable and sure to take place. Perhaps the latter would have avoided it if he could, but Bracebridge was as suspicious, when his suspicions were aroused, as he was credulous when they were not.

'It's a rum move,' he said to Mortimer, 'a very rum move; indeed, the rummest move *I* ever heard of, and I've known some rum moves in my time, *I* have; but he's the queerest fellow I ever met, *he* is—the queerest; a very good fellow, and I like him. Like him! Why, do you think I—. Of course not.'—Guy often considered it unnecessary to finish his sentences, just as he often considered it necessary to repeat them—'Of course not. I say I like him; but I don't know what he's driving at—

not a bit—just not one bit. There! Why, of course he has got money from Mumford, Brown, and Co. As if *I* didn't know *that*! Know it! Why, of course, I know it. If he hasn't—but he *has*—why, of course he has—but if he hasn't, why was he so anxious to get me to introduce him to the Culletons —wretched people, that my father wouldn't have had at his table? Wretched people; but Mumford's son married Culleton's third daughter—egad, I wish I had—thirty thousand pounds, sir, thirty thousand pounds—and *he* knew that he could get an introduction to Mumford through them. As if I don't know that! And then, to tell you that he's not getting any money from the Party. He's a very clever fellow, is Horncastle—a very clever fellow; but he's a great fool in some things—in some things. And, if he wanted Mumford and Brown to help him, he had better have told me at once. But of course I know he's got money from them, or a promise of it—a *promise* of it. But he won't get in, for all that; if he does, it will surprise me; and if he does, he may thank me. He didn't choose to tell me what he was after; as if I couldn't guess it at once; he didn't choose to tell me, I say, but if

he gets in, he may thank me, that's all—that's all; but he won't—you'll see that he won't.'

Now all this was sheer guess; whether sound guess or shallow, I am unable to say. Had honest Guy been talking to anybody other than Mortimer, he would have repudiated the notion of Horncastle's getting anything through the Whig parliamentary agents, and still more determinedly have scouted the notion that he would not get in for Veerborough.

'Not get in!' he would break out in his own rooms to a knot of loafers, or to a more mixed audience at the 'Bohemian,'—'Not get in! you'll see if he doesn't get in; he's a cleverer fellow than you all think for; he's as clever a fellow as I ever saw. Isn't he though? The very cleverest fellow *I* ever met, *he* is. Money from the Reform! As if they'd give it him, if he wanted it! From the Reform! Do you think, if there was money to be had from the Reform, I wouldn't have had some long ago.' And then the jolly visitors laugh. 'Why, bless your life, he's got relations in the neighbourhood of Veerborough. Do you think a man would go down and contest a place—yes, and get in?

You'll see if he doesn't get in—if he had no influence there. I know Horncastle better than any of you; and I know he's got relations there—of course he has.'

These relations, when Bracebridge was again closeted with Mortimer, cut a very sorry figure.

'Relations!' he would say, 'I should like to know what relations he has there or anywhere. He has an uncle, a maltster or something—something very poor. Relations! Why, it's absurd; and even if he had relations—which he hasn't—not relations likely to be of any use to him; if he *had* relations, what would *they* to do for him. I've got relations, and I should like to do what they've done for me? Nothing. Oh, *my* relations have not only done nothing for me, they've just prevented me from doing anything for myself. If that scoundrel my brother—. Relations! I know where he's got the money—he's got it from Mumford and Brown, and he may thank me for it.'

Now let no one accuse honest Guy of duplicity in this matter. He was a loyal, chivalrous gentleman, who would have made any and every possible sacrifice for many a person for whom he cared far

less than he cared for Grattan Horncastle. Their good name, too, he would have defended against all comers. He had always thoroughly believed in and, as the phrase is, cracked up his indefatigable friend as a wonder of wonders, and he was not going to let him down now. Horncastle might have taken him by surprise in this last singular proceeding, and he might have been a deal better pleased if Horncastle had apprised him of it beforehand; but until the proceeding ended in failure, Bracebridge would defend its being undertaken, and prognosticate its triumphant issue to all the world—to all the world but Mortimer. Here the case was different. They had a perfect right between themselves to scrutinize their friend's projects, rigidly calculate his means, and forecast his prospects without let or favour. Between them, it was Mortimer who affected to be more satisfied and sanguine than he felt; for it was Bracebridge who here gave vent to all his doubts, disappointment, and perplexities. But whatever was said by either, whether to others or between themselves, they were actuated by the bravest motives, and prompted by the most friendly considerations. They might be very

much puzzled, but they certainly hoped for the best.

One of them, at any rate, might possibly have been a little enlightened—and yet, like the reader, possibly not have been enlightened as yet in the least—had he been present at, or happened to be informed of, *one* interview which certainly did take place between their friend and Messrs. Mumford and Brown before the former went north on his electioneering journey. On this occasion, money was certainly not the subject of conversation, but Mortimer Dyneley's cousin was. Horncastle pointed out to these political agents how lukewarm had been the countenance and how independent the votes of the member for Pocketford during the last few months of the session; how he had always been a moderate Whig, not unlikely to become in the altered times a moderate Tory; and how it would be worth while to back up as dexterously as they could any more Radical candidate who should start in opposition. If they would do this, he promised them the candidate should be forthcoming. A couple of days after, Mr. Dyneley was made unpleasantly aware by a large red placard forwarded by his

local agent to London, that Pocketford, where he imagined himself undisputed master, would be contested by a friend of the people. He felt pretty sure that he had only to put the screw on to make his return certain; but he would have to undergo considerable annoyance and expense. He at once hurried down to his borough.

Aloof from tortuous ambitions, with nought to tax the quiet of the full-fledged woods, Mortimer meanwhile led classic life at Gracewood. Awaiting in dignified seclusion the lot which his kinsman might provide for him, he was well satisfied to spend the interval in the society of his books and thoughts; curious to note how the moderns have abandoned the grammatical precision of the ancients, without discarding or much advancing on their ideas. Positivism was not so familiar a word, nor inductive science so generally pursued, three-and-twenty years ago as now; but of the pregnancy of the former and the importance of the latter he was intimately convinced. Still that which, existent in or accruing from both, most appropriated his interest, *viz.* the idea of unequivocal and universal law, he was pleased to find proclaimed in periods

never since excelled, by the Latin disciple of Epicurus. So that, prompted by his taste to shrink from the strife which necessarily accompanies modern action, he was equally without motive to attempt any addition to the store of thought, most of which it seemed to him had not as yet been exhausted by use. It needs indeed an 'unspiritual God'* to get work out of such a man, be his capacity or even his ambition what it may. Circumstance may work the miracle, nothing internal can. But guard against pitying, much less despising, such a nature. You little know what terrible energy may reside in the man who has never yet manifested a single symptom of activity. The indolence that has never been anything else, is by no means to be trusted. For the present, however, his activity was manifested only in the saddle.

Yet let me, even now, be just. There was smaller wail of woful poverty, and more successful struggling with hard-pinching penury, in the immediate neighbourhood of Gracewood than had been known for many a day. The left hand can easily

* 'Circumstance, that unspiritual God.'—*Childe Harold.*

be kept in ignorance when the right is so undemonstrative as Mortimer's.

But, as I say, all that was usually seen in it was a book or a riding-whip. In Alwoodley Chase it was deep set summer; and in its grateful shade again he had begun to saunter. The 'five or six weeks' which were to be spent in Wales were more than over, and he readily persuaded himself that he was no true knight unless, faithful to his promise he lingered in the sylvan winding-ways where the tether of the poor chained prisoner occasionally extended. Had it been tightened? That she had returned he knew, for the day before yesterday he had called at the Priory and learned that, though 'not at home,' the Chestertons were again domesticated. You think him singularly sedulous in his waiting in the woods, and are, perhaps, inclined to draw somewhat hasty conclusions. But the leafy interspaces of Alwoodley were pretty much the same to Mortimer as the trimmer arbour of the cottage; and thirty miles of saddle are a very small matter to a man who is constantly in it. Judge him neither by your own occupations nor your own subjection to fatigue. He was putting himself to

no inconvenience and sacrificing no other pursuit in his bi-weekly frequenting of the remote and solitary glades. Nature was an old companion of his, a senior and still sedater friend, who had told him many wise things, and was constantly telling him more. In her society it was impossible to be irri tated or impatient. She was always there, even if the slender maiden came not.

But come at last she did: as a sultry summer afternoon was sobering down into less scorching mood, a tiny little foot peeping out as she cantered past the by-path where Mortimer, the mare quiet at his side, lay reading unobserved. *Ex pede Herculem.* That foot proclaims a Diana.

In a second he was in his seat, and in ten seconds at her side. She well might start.

'It is fortunate my eyes are more observant—or, must I say?—more anxious than yours.' He held out his hand. 'It seems so long since we met that it is almost necessary to say I am delighted to see you.'

'Perhaps,' she answered, warmly returning his pressure, 'equally necessary for me to say that

you would probably have seen me before, had it been possible.'

'Has anything occurred?' he asked.

'Nothing special,' she answered, smiling. 'It is not necessary to imagine any extraordinary incident to account for my seclusion. I have not been here since I last saw you, more than ten weeks ago. We have been in Wales for six.'

'Yes; I know.'

'You know. How?'

'Mrs. Thatchley told me you were going there, one day when I called just before your departure.'

'I did not hear of your visit. We got back only ten days ago.'

'I know that also.'

'That too! You know everything.'

'I learned it from your servant on Tuesday, when I called again, but you were not at home.'

'I did not hear of that visit, either.'

They both laughed outright, but said nothing further.

'How did you enjoy your trip?'

'Wales is very lovely and picturesque; and so

much, at least, I enjoyed immensely. George Forrester was with us.'

'Indeed. You say I know everything. *That*, at any rate, I did not know.'

'What do you think of him?'

'I have not had so many opportunities of judging, Miss Chesterton, as you have.'

'Is the old bond of frankness to be considered as ended?' she said, looking straight aside at him.

'Certainly not,' he answered quickly. 'I think him a loyal gentleman.'

'*Cela se peut.* Indeed it is so. But, I mean, what do you think of his mental calibre?'

'He is not a travelled thane. But then, most English gentlemen are not pundits.'

'Are most English gentlemen very stupid? There!'

'No. Is George Forrester?'

'Yes; very. You know he is, as well as I do. Now, please help me; or why am I here?'

'Very well, I will,' he answered merrily. 'But if I blunder, forgive me. You are requested to marry him? Eh?'

'When you *are* frank, there is no mistaking you. No; I am not requested—I wonder you did not

say, *ordered*—to marry him. It is the other way. I more than suspect that he is ordered to marry me, and that the poor creature, as far as in him lies, will perforce comply. As you say, he is a loyal gentleman. Can we do nothing for him?'

'*You* can do something for him. *You* can *marry* him.'

She stretched out her little hand imploringly.

'Don't, Mr. Dyneley, please. I know you are only teazing me. But I want you to be serious and really to advise me.' She spoke very gravely. 'Unquestionably, they will want me to marry him; and unquestionably, I never will. You know, from what I told you before, at what point my obedience will cease, and passive resistance commence. *I* am doomed, I know. But can nothing be done for him? Poor fellow! he is blameless. He is told to torment me, and he does so without knowing it. This I could bear, since I am accustomed to bear worse. But I suppose that a man cannot go on long making love to a girl, especially if unsuccessfully, without getting finally to love her? And to love and not be loved is, I imagine, a greater pain even than to be loved and not to love. The

latter I am armed to undergo, if necessary. But Heaven knows, Mr. Dyneley, I would spare him or anyone else the former. Tell me! how am I to do it?'

He did not answer her at once; but after gazing hard at her a moment, stared out between his horse's ears. At last, he said:

'The first point to be considered, Miss Chesterton, is whether you should do anything at all. If you do nothing, it is probable that matters will remain as they are for some little time. If you do what I imagine you think you ought to do—make him distinctly understand what he has to expect at your hands—you may succeed in shaking him off. But do you think you will not soon be fastened with another? Now to the torment of being loved by Mr. Forrester you have more or less got accustomed. You would certainly be provided with a new suitor, and worse inasmuch as new. Unless—what is of course possible but scarcely probable—that the new one provided for you should turn out not to be a torment at all.'

'That is not only improbable but impossible. I know too well the society which has been and will

continue to be *provided* for the Priory. But I shall have to claim your forgiveness in seeming to impute to you motives not quite so generous as my own. However, it is natural that you should be a little selfish in my regard rather than in George Forrester's. But believe me when I say that *I* can think only of him. I will face all other possible torments, not to rid myself of him, but to rid him of me.'

She had turned more towards him as she concluded her words, as though to give them greater impressiveness, and he towards her, bound to an oblivious stare by inexpressible admiration.

'You are a brave girl, and I reverence you.'

'Many thanks for so kindly spoken an assurance; it will console me through many torments. But what then can I do?'

'Are you sure that he loves you?'

'I still strongly hope that he does not; but I have no room for hoping that he does not obediently seek to marry me.'

'After all, you must tread on safer ground than I can pretend to tread. Your judgment is as sound in the matter as mine; and your opportunities of arriving at a right conclusion are infinitely greater.

Mine are none. But if you are informing me rightly—and of course you intend to do so—the best way for you to carry out your benevolent intentions would be rather to make than await an occasion for putting them into practice. You know better than I can know what is maidenly; but if your instincts assure you that he is in full pursuit, seize the very first and faintest opportunity to appeal to his loyalty to desist.'

'How good you are!' she said sweetly. 'That was exactly what I wanted to know, though what I could not exactly ask you. Oh, how glad I am that I have seen you! I think that there is time to save him, at least, from much pain or mortification.'

They were solemn and perorating words, such as seem by their very sound to smite the listener into silence. Both were thoughtful, and for some time speechless. Unchecked the quiet-striding steeds held inarticulate converse, curb by curb. There was not the flutter of a leaf, and the May songs were long since hushed. The woods, like the world, grow less sonorous when showery spring has settled into comfortable summer. Larks mostly soar in the morning!

'You see I am still what most people would call unemployed,' he said at length. 'I have not yet got an appointment—save that of your honorary counsel.'

'An unremunerative office, in truth. But do you not find the absence of any definite occupation irksome to you?'

'No; at least, not when the sun shines. I am not fond of contention, and indeed should never accept it till it was forced upon me. And it is difficult to have any definite occupation now-a-days without being dragged into strife. A man is no longer permitted to live, even under his own figtree, except on condition of constantly defending it. There is a great political cry just now against Protection; but it seems to me we have long since ceased to protect the individual; and by ceasing to protect the individual, we are giving to society—so strong is it—a virtual monopoly. The weakest to the wall used to be the cry of strong brave days: it is to be the justification of these weak craven ones. Extremes meet. The real social results of modern civilization seem to be but those of ancient barbarism, with a scientific varnish. The shallow sciolists, who are

wresting the sound abstract laws of political economy to their own unsound and particular applications, are perfectly right in one sense. There will always be a fair supply of weak folks in answer to the demand of the strong ones.'

'But you are not weak.'

'Weak enough not to wish to be strong at anybody else's expense. Weak enough to dislike being hit, but still more to dislike hitting. The hands that come away, full or empty, from a scramble, are not usually very clean.'

'But is there no other quieter sphere for exertion?'

'There used to be two others,' he replied; 'the sphere of contemplation and of active art; but the second has become as much of a free fight as the industrial scramble, without the latter's unquestionably successful results; and contemplation has become almost impossible, and entirely a reproach. Yet so far within possibility, it has been mine.'

'What you say about contemplation I think I comprehend; but what do you mean by active art being equally an industrial scramble without any corresponding benefits?'

'This; that the industrial scramble benefits somebody—the somebody who gets the most by it; whereas competition in art can only produce furniture, not divine workmanship, and so does no good, as art, either to him who produces or to him who buys. To all the demand in the world there comes no natural supply of Raffaeli or Praxiteles, but only a shoal of Robinsons and Smiths; with chisel and paint-brush, certainly, but very little more. Mind; I am accusing nobody; neither Smith nor Smith's patron. I am only saying that the patron has got a large fortune to spend in well-covered canvas, and the well-covered canvas is quickly forthcoming; just as quickly as teapots or fire-irons. There is not very much difference in the processes, and scarcely much more in the result. I would as lief in these days be an ironmonger as what is still courteously called an artist.'

'I could not discuss such a question,' she remarked, 'even if I saw my way of differing from you. I hope you will not think, because I say nothing, that I am not interested, and do not partially, at least, comprehend. Then your contemplative life is to continue?'

'I suppose so. At least until Mr. Dyneley provides me with an occupation, just as at present he provides me with the means of abstaining from any. I am perfectly aware that, in this restless country, a man is not highly esteemed who, holding aloof from the general turmoil, is content to exist on the benevolence of others. However, I am not at the mercy of other people's consciences, and have studied my elements of morality neither in the market-place nor the newspaper. I am quite satisfied to reap what others sow; of course, in moderation. I should not, whilst blaming as I distinctly blame anybody who devotes his life to making half-a-million of money, be so inconsistent as to devote my life to spending it. My cousin allows me five hundred a-year, and I spend it—on myself. If he allowed me five thousand I might possibly spend it, but in that case on others. If he gave me more, I should simply pass it on to somebody else. These being my opinions, I receive without any sense of loss of dignity, and having received, I employ my time as I think best under the circumstances. I think I would fight to-morrow for a good cause;' and he stretched out a long, muscular arm, that

would have told to the good in any contest; 'but' —and the arm swung back to its side—'at present I do not see one. So peace is best. Men erst deemed holy have led blameless life in unremunerative commerce with the mountains. The mountains remain, though the blamelessness imputed to their worshippers may have passed away. But as long as the still small voice can make itself heard amid the turbulent unanimity of modern society, I shall continue to think that ruminating on a seaward slope is as pious an occupation as buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest.'

'But you do not mean to condemn the commercial pursuits of modern times?' she asked.

'By no means, save when they are carried to an excess. It would be just as wise to condemn a man for being a bootmaker instead of a botanist; though of course I should condemn him if he were *all* bootmaker. But I ask for myself the toleration which I extend to others. There are a good many animals which we can neither eat nor put into the shafts—a good many flowers which we never see—and a fair amount of stars that do not give us much light. May there not still be also human indivi-

duals who fulfil some cosmical functions without either hewing wood or drawing water? Perhaps man cannot be too economical; but let us leave to nature her long-established privilege of splendid prodigality. Even I may be more useful than people imagine, or than I myself perceive.'

The last words were said with a cheerfulness which, contrasting with the solemnity of those that had gone before, seemed to establish a close to the conversation. She only added—

'You have been very useful to me to-day, and I thank you much.'

'I would do anything,' he said ardently, 'anything to make you happier.'

'Happier!' she exclaimed. 'Happier is not and need not be the question. If you strengthen my will and back up my conscience, it is all you can ever do. But to do so much for poor me, is indeed a Samaritan's office.'

'It is well you are grateful for so little, since there is so little for me to do. You have already told me, that your conscience will be evoked, and your will exercised only in answer to one challenge,

and that in everything else you will yield complete submission.'

'I said so,and I meant it.'

'You accused me, when we met to-day, of forgetting our bond of frankness. In order to send you away with a correcter impression, I am going to ask yet another question. You will refuse to marry whom you do not love—'

'Yes; absolutely.'

'Yes, but will you abstain from marrying whom you do love, should such ever occur?'

'I have scarcely anticipated the possibility,' she answered, simply. 'But, replying to a question not fully weighed since really never considered, I say that my submission would extend to such a case. Should such a perplexity occur, however, I will—if I may—trust you sufficiently to consult you.'

'Do so,' he answered; 'and I will advise you loyally, as I have advised you to-day.'

And they parted.

Mortimer has either become, these last two months, a more confirmed smoker than before, or to-night he is indulging in meditative fumes

beyond his wont. He has thrown away his fourth vesper cheroot, and now he sets alight his fifth. His hands are plunged very deep into his pockets, and his head is carried very high in the air, as though with more than usual purposes of prospective inquiry. It is a still, sultry night. The hay has all gone from the meadows, and the smell of the fast-ripening corn is hot and dry. The nightingale no longer cheers his brooding mate with song, as in that now-recalled May moonlight. For the smooth, warm eggs are now a hungry little family, and the plump grub is more welcome than the mellow note. The air is not so moist and fresh and balmy; and the light-blue trail of the tropical narcotic seems no special profanation of the night. Smoke on, O loiterer! if to thy apparent wonderings such idlesse prompt a solution.

Nothing so much delights the matrons of a bachelor's acquaintance, as the information that he has taken a 'place.' Be it ever so small or unpretentious, and though it satisfy the most rigorous of agrarian and sumptuary laws, a mere *apto cum lare fundus*, such as would meet the limitations imposed by the severer Cato, provided that it be

a 'place,' it is enough. They have got him in the toils of the snarer. Often and often, when they fondly deemed him irrecoverably emmeshed, they had to endure the insolent strain, *Laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus.* But that was in the days of clubs and chambers. Let the net of the fowler but once encompass him now, and he shall be set free never again. Let the poor fool think that he will build his nest aloof from the hunter's track,—small, secluded, difficult to see, and when seen, of but slight account. Let him, emulous of old Ennius on the Aventine, restrict himself *unius ancillæ ministerio;* paying no tax on powder or armorial bearings, and with only one poor waiting-maid. He thinks it not, but he is utterly undone. Love is almost as impartial as Death, and though it perhaps forbore from climbing a weary Temple staircase, will be dead certain very soon to kick at a cottage door, be it ever so lowly. That cottage will hold two just as well as one. And when the sun goes down, and the night closes in, 'one' is occasionally just a little lonely. He may be a very brave fellow, a self-sufficient nature enough, and whilst daylight hours tick, may

possibly not find much missing. But dews are falling, and rest comes with the night, we know, and resting, alone, is not always repose. There is no jolly fellow Brown over the way, no new opera, no old comedy just down the lane, no billiard-room in the orchard, and not much indolent gossip going on in the copse. We have all our weak moments, even we strong ones. And the tread of the snarer is stealthy but sure, and the nets are closing in, and O for something in the empty semi-circle of those poor vacant arms! Nature surely abhors such a terrible vacuum as that? 'Ware, boy, 'ware! I say. You may have trodden the ball-room, one heel more invulnerable than Achilles', and even swept the sward of the 'Botanical' and come off unscathed. But for all that, there lurks a matrimonial serpent in the lawn you have once made, but will not long retain exclusively, your own.

Mortimer had taken a place; as small, if as perfect, as might be, but—a 'place.' A placid Pythagorianism could, perhaps, be transplanted from the Magna Græcia made familiar to him by travel, and find a fitting soil in his English

Tarentum. But we are not—thank Heaven!—all philosophy; and even a sage of five-and-twenty may confess without shame a periodical longing for something more carnal than first principles.

He had never loved, and he did not love now. I said it of him two months back. I can say it of him still. How, during the last six years—the years during which a man is most liable to recurring fits of sentimental or unworthier passion—he escaped the visitation of either, I have already minutely described. But he was not now, by reason of such escape, any the more likely to become enamoured of a shadow. Thought had not made him a dreamer. Despite his still-hardening fastidiousness and his morbid sensitiveness to outline and colour, if he loved, he would love a body, not a dress; a head, not a bonnet; a soul, not a demeanour; a person, not an apparition. His love would be not for the girl whom he wooed, but for the wife whom he won. He might—and let us hope he would—conclude his matrimonial campaign by the manifestation of most prodigal tenderness; but he would certainly commence it with the most collected conviction. He would not, boy-like

pine for the lips he had never kissed; but he would never, having kissed, boy-like desert them.

Then what were his convictions? They were unformed, but they were in embryo. The silent influence, so trusted in by matrons, was working its way. He had got his cage, but within no bird was singing. The little wicket was ajar, the seed-box was untouched, the lithe-necked water-flask was empty. Would not a cageling be well?

And where was such to be found? In what woods, if not of Alwoodley?

But had he not been told, this very day, that the principle of submission would extend even to abstaining from marriage from one loving and loved?'

Could he love?

Even if he could, would he here be loved?

Both affirmed, was it not absolutely certain that abstention would in this case be enforced, even if by no more compulsory means, by the principle of submission?

True: but quite apart from the influence of his cottage, and of Miss Chesterton's charms, he was keenly interested in her situation. He had wrought himself up to silent but not less deep indignation at

the domestic despotism which bound her. He had half pledged himself to undertake her emancipation. But how was he to complete that emancipation, except by making her his wife?

Whereat, the obstacles above recounted again cropped up, bringing smaller but scarcely less pertinent ones in their train.

Nothing, however, like a difficulty for strengthening a determination.

Mind: Mortimer was far from determined in the matter. Only—he would entertain it. The difficulties, I suppose, likewise.

Emancipation! Where are the winged sandals, where is the magic wallet, where the invisible-making helm? Ah! I fear the nymphs are dead. This is the industrial age. But, poor and classic Mortimer, you ought to remember that, even in the mythological, the Perseus who saved and married Andromeda was Perseus *Aurigena!* *

* Fair readers are not so intimately acquainted with mythology as were their sisters of the last century; such learning not being considered 'proper' in these decent days. It is therefore, perhaps, requisite that I should inform them that Perseus was the son of Zeus and Danaë, and that he acquired his surname of Aurigena from the fact of the former having divinely visited the latter in the form of a shower of gold.

CHAPTER VI.

The Whigs had taken nothing by the Dissolution. Parliament reassembled. An Amendment was proposed to the Address, and carried. Sir Robert Peel was summoned by the Crown to form a Cabinet, and was fronted by a defeated and disorganized party. The Opposition benches were in a minority of ninety. But on those benches were Mr. Dyneley and Grattan Horncastle. The Friend of the People had not succeeded in exciting the interest or conquering the cupidity of the electors of Pocketford. But everybody who had a grudge to pay, everybody who could be cajoled by tact, everybody who could be influenced by exuberant youth and hearty manners, had conspired and succeeded in returning at the head of the poll the new and energetic member for Veerborough. Had such a victory been won when the House was sitting, it would at once have given the winner a

parliamentary status not to be attained by years of business-like toil within its walls. Even happening as it did, in the conflicting turmoil of a general election, it made Grattan Horncastle at once a man of mark.

'Didn't I say so?' went about exclaiming Guy Bracebridge, now in immense feather. 'Didn't I tell you fellows he would get in? Wouldn't get in! As if I didn't know he'd get in. Yes, and you'll see what he'll do now that he *has* got in. Money from the party! A likely story.' And so on, *da capo*, as we had it before.

Mortimer went up to town on purpose to congratulate his friend, and in the presence of Bracebridge had the whole story of the contest from the conqueror's lips. This was lively as the battle itself had been; and success appeared to leave Horncastle what he was before it—a man of the most cordial and unaffected manners, most genial friendliness, and most cheerful activity. When the matter had been thoroughly talked over, and congratulations iterated and reiterated, Horncastle inquired if Mortimer had seen Mr. Dyneley.

'No, not yet. I saw that he had to stand a

contest. I know he did not expect anything of the kind; for the last time I was with him before he left town, he told me that he should have a quiet walk over.'

'Who was it ran against him?' asked Bracebridge.

'Heaven knows! A poor fellow of the name of Tuck, an out-and-out Radical, a Friend of the People, and that sort of thing. I got hold of his address in the same paper which contained my cousin's. And, by Jove! he polled seventy or eighty votes; which, in a constituency of two hundred and sixty, where a man fancies himself Sultan, is a decent minority.'

'Do you think Mr. Dyneley cares about it?' asked Horncastle.

'As I tell you, I have not seen him since. But if he not only does not care about it, but is not furiously savage, I shall wonder. It would not be like him, if he were not.'

'But,' said Horncastle, 'what could make Luck—'

'Tuck,' said Mortimer.

'Then, Tuck—what could make Tuck go on

such a fool's errand as that? He surely had not a chance against your cousin?'

'Oh!' said Bracebridge; 'why, they sent him, of course. The Party—*your* Party—sent him; of course they did. A man would not be such an ass as to go without backing of some sort.'

'Do you think so?'

'Why, of course. You know, Dyneley, your cousin has not been voting very straight of late; and they were mad with him.'

'I shouldn't wonder,' said Mortimer. 'What do you think, Grattan?'

'It's difficult to say. However, if they did, they have not got much by their move; Mr. Dyneley is safe enough where he is.'

'Yes; but a man does not like being opposed by the Party which he has on the whole supported for fifteen or twenty years. If they did it, it was a dirty trick.'

'Yes—a very dirty trick; and one my cousin would not be likely to forgive in a hurry.'

'When are you going to see him?'

'Yes—old fellow! when are you going to see him? You ought to go and see him—see him

often. Egad! if I had such a chance, I would always be seeing him. Just give me the chance: that's all—that's all. See him! But if I had a cousin or an anybody with as much money and influence, he wouldn't see *me*: I know he wouldn't. Now, he wants to see *you*. Some fellows have luck: *I* haven't. Luck! why—Um! I wish *I* had such a chance; that's all—that's just all. When are you going to see him?'

'As soon as he gets back: indeed, I must go down to Pall Mall now, and find out if he has returned. If so, I shall go west, and look him up.'

The moment he had gone, Horncastle said:

'The fact is—only mind, you never let it out, or at any rate never on any account say that you heard it from me—but the fact is, the Party *did* send down Tuck. They were so mad with Dyneley for some of his recent votes, and felt so uncertain of his future ones, that they thought it worth trying if they could not throw him out of his seat. Don't tell Mortimer; and mind, you never tell anybody *I* said so.'

Mortimer dined the next day with his cousin,

and was regaled with another budget of electioneering talk. Old Dyneley was furious upon the question of Tuck's opposition. The fellow was a low knave, a scoundrel, an impertinent interloper, a scurrilous brute (some very pretty things had been said and printed and sung about the lord of the manor), a foul-mouthed, unprincipled vagabond, pandering to the lowest passions of the mob, a greasy stump-orator (old Dyneley had not the *copia fandi* very strikingly), and so on. And if he thought, for a moment, that his own Party had sent down the fellow—which of course he could not credit—but if he thought they had given the ruffian the slightest encouragement, by this and by that and by ever so much more, he would make them smart for it; he would show them, not only who was master at Pocketford, but who was master also of his own votes in the House of Commons, and who could bring influence to bear in other boroughs now returning Whigs. To all which Mortimer replied that he knew nothing; that he could not think people were such fools as not to see that nobody had any chance against him at Pocketford; but that the opposition there had been vexatious.

Vexatious! Yes; and exceedingly expensive to him. Vexatious, and unprincipled, and uncalled for, and unwarranted, and everything. Such words as these, at least, old Dyneley had in plenty, when his audience was select, and there was nobody minded to reply.

It was some weeks before Mortimer again saw Bracebridge; and when they met, their first talk was of course about their friend.

'Well, how is he getting on?' asked the former, who, from habitual absence from town, now saw much less of Horncastle than did the other.

'Getting on! Well, I scarcely know; I can scarcely ever get to see him. He has got into his new chambers, and I have been in them twice: twice, that's all. They are much better than his old ones, much better; as they ought to be—ought to be; considering what he pays for them. You're surety to the Inn for the rent, are you not?'

'Yes; he wrote to me in the country, and asked me if I would be one, and said that you were going to be the other. Of course, I was very glad.'

'Glad! yes, glad—I should be glad—and am glad, *am* glad—if I were like you; which I'm not.

Of course I told him I would be the other. I wonder they would have me as surety, considering I have not paid my own last half-year's rent.'

'I suppose it is more a form than anything else?'

'Is it, though? It's no form, I can tell you. Ask old Bunting, Q.C., if it's a form. They brought an action against him and sold him up, that's what they did; and I tell you what—Horncastle's a very clever fellow, a devilish clever fellow—you know that—yes, and *I* know that, *I* know that—but it'll take a devilish lot of cleverness to go on long as he's going on.'

'As how?' asked Mortimer. 'I am sure he is not extravagant—he has not one expensive habit.'

'No; but he must live, and he must pay somebody. Somebody: I don't mean to say he must pay everybody—*I* don't pay everybody; but he pays nobody—nobody. Now, a man may be a devilish clever fellow, but he can't go on paying nobody—nobody at all; which he does. It's all very well to get into Parliament, and he's very much to be admired for getting in—I don't deny it—though he may thank me for it, though he

doesn't know it, or pretends he doesn't know it—*pretends* he doesn't; but *he* knows it, he knows it—it's all very well; but though a Member of Parliament can't be arrested, he must pay somebody, or answer their letters—answer their letters at any rate—and he doesn't.'

'Have you seen him lately?'

'Seen him! I can't get into his chambers. He pretends he's not there; but of course I know he's there. As if I didn't know that; of course I know he's there. You remember, he never used to open his door, in the old chambers, without looking through that little window to see who it was. Now, he can't see who it is till he has opened the door; and so he doesn't open it at all—at all. *I* know why he doesn't open it: he daren't open it—daren't open it. Not that I think he cares much—indeed, he doesn't care a d—n,—just not a d—n, that's all—about his duns; only he doesn't want to be bothered. See him! I've seen him twice, perhaps. The rooms are very nice, but they're just as much of a litter as the others were. But haven't *you* seen them?'

'No; I called once, but he was not in.'

'There! Didn't I tell you? No; and you won't find him in: but he's in, sure enough—only he doesn't choose to open. I don't mean to say he wouldn't open if he knew it was you; but then he doesn't. How can he? And *I* go, and *I* don't see him. Nobody sees him.'

To the vulgar objectors who had never believed in Horncastle's return, over whom honest Guy had crowed so lustily, and who now asked him how it was that nobody ever saw him, and that nobody could get into his chambers, and that a lot of duns were always hanging about his staircase, Bracebridge discoursed in a very different strain.

'Not get into his rooms! What did they want to get into his rooms for? Horncastle was now a Member of Parliament: a busy man, and he could not be bothered with every fellow who wanted to see him. Of course, hundreds of people wanted to see him. A few of them might be duns. What then? Most people had duns. Duns wanted to see *him* (Bracebridge). Oh, and they might see *him*, they did see *him;* and what good did it do them? They might see him as much as ever they liked. *He* was not going to sport his oak, if they thought fit to

come all together in a deputation. But *he* was not in Parliament. Egad! he wished he were. If he had only the chance; but with Horncastle it was different. Couldn't pay his bills! Not pay his bills! Why, he thought they said the Party had paid his electioneering expenses. Why did they not pay his bills, then? Tell him that.' And Guy put them down, and crowed over them bravely all round; but with Mortimer it was another story.

'Duns! He may well have duns. Where he gets any money at all, *I* can't tell. His cousin! Why, a maltster: why, it's absurd. Everybody says that the Party paid his electioneering expenses. Why, of course they did. It's very well for him to tell you that they didn't; but he doesn't tell *me* that. He doesn't tell *me* anything. He knows it would be no use, for *I* know how his expenses were paid. Why, they were paid through Mumford and Brown. Why was he so anxious for me to introduce him to those wretched people, the Culletons, if they were not? Well now, shall I tell you something? You remember our talking about the man who went down to oppose your cousin?'

'Tuck.'

'Yes, Tuck. Well, Horncastle told me—mind, you must never tell anybody that it came from him —Horncastle told me that he knew that the Party had sent Tuck down to Pocketford.'

'You don't say so?'

'But they did. Horncastle told me *that*. Well now, if he knows it, does it not prove that he must be pretty well in with the Party, himself? Why, of course, they paid his expenses; but they won't pay any more: they won't pay his bills, he may be pretty sure.'

Poor Guy! If he said an important thing by accident, he never knew it, and immediately drivelled off to some other immaterial matter which had been longer on his mind and oftener on his lips. It will be remembered that Horncastle had particularly insisted on his not mentioning to Mortimer what had passed between them, about the Friend of the People; but Horncastle knew Bracebridge through and through, and could not have doubted that he would let the secret out at an early opportunity.

'By Jove! how savage my cousin would be if he knew it. He has said enough about it already.'

'Don't tell him; or, if you ever do tell him, mind you never let him suppose that it came originally from Horncastle.'

'Of course, I would not mix Horncastle up with it, on any account; but I declare I think he ought to know.'

'So do I. It was such a shabby trick.'

'Desperately shabby. I am going to my cousin shortly, to Northumberland. He has a shooting there.'

'That's right, old boy. *You* stick to your cousin; that's what *you*'ve got to do. Ah! if *I* had such a chance! but I haven't.'

'It will be rather late in the year, and dreary; but he seems particularly to wish to have me there, and I suppose I must go.'

'Go! Of course you must go. I wish *I* could go. How long will you stay there?'

'I don't think I shall be south again much before Christmas.'

'That's right. *You* stay with your cousin. Why don't you get him to put you into Parliament? Horncastle says you ought to go into the House, and he's right, there. Ah! I wish *I* could get into the House! that's all. Send us some game, old boy.'

'With pleasure; I won't forget. Good-bye then.' And the friends separated after a conversation more important than either of them thought for.

Mortimer lingered at Gracewood as long as ever he possibly could, and periodically haunted the avenues of Alwoodley, till the first autumnal tints began to show strongly on the leaves. Mr. Dyneley became pressing for his presence. Still he lingered, but he lingered in vain. Many a sweet sober afternoon glided by in the umbrageous intricacies of the Chase; but the flutter of a grey riding-habit came no more. Thrice he had called at the Priory, and thrice had been admitted. Once indeed he had been asked to dinner; but, for any converse that passed between him and Miss Chesterton, he might as well have been dining at the Antipodes. Their eyes met oftener, perhaps, than heretofore; but another pair was too dexterously turned from one to the other, for the meeting to be, each time, more than momentary. He thought that both host and hostess were more cordial than they had shown themselves for many months; but the cordiality of the first was, he knew well enough, only the reflection of the cordiality of the second; and the cordiality of the

second was evidently much less owing to her having ceased to regard him as abnormal and therefore dangerous, than to the conviction that against such danger she could effectually guard. With Mortimer's mood of mind, it took little to make him suspect that she was desirous of showing how very little she feared, however much she objected to him. Long before it had ever entered his head to connect Miss Chesterton, even vaguely as he connected her now, with his own possible future, he had imagined, rightly or wrongly, that Mrs. Thatchley had imputed to him such a design, and had manœuvred steadily, though unnecessarily, against it. Now that he had more than once confessed to himself how charming the daughter was when unrestrained, how infamous was the persistence with which that restraint was organized and maintained, how brave a conquest it would be to enfranchise her, and how difficult it would be to accomplish that enfranchisement without a union, whose realization however on the other hand would be still more difficult, it was not likely that he would be slower to impute to Mrs. Thatchley suspicion of his ideas and determination to

balk them. Her conduct justified his belief then, and it justified him now; but now it had the effect of aggravating and provoking; before, it had only slightly disgusted him. Then, it was a stupidity; now, it was something very like a challenge. If he was supposed to have accepted it, he was certainly getting the worst of the encounter.

This fairly represents the state of things as it appeared to him, and the corresponding state of his own mind. What was likely to be the result? More, or less, interest in Miss Chesterton? Stronger, or fainter, inclination to think that it would be right chivalrous work to unfetter this poor victim? Greater, or smaller, tendency to become convinced that, unfettered, she would make him a bright, loving, intelligent wife? And from all this would there ensue a weaker, or fiercer, resolve to face the difficulties and have a throw with them? The student of human nature will be at no loss for a reply.

If he was really ready to try a throw with that sturdy duenna, he had as yet perhaps not met with a positive fall, but had at any rate gained not an inch on his lithe and obstinate opponent. It is the

last night, the very last chance for ever so long, and he knows it. He must positively travel north, the day after to-morrow. For all that, he has to be content with a placid 'Good-bye' all round, and a parting shake of the hand from Miss Chesterton, exceedingly friendly if you will, but—exceedingly unfruitful. He must go into winter-quarters. There can be no more campaigning till the spring.

But Time, if we did but know it, is a kind and considerate, if only sleeping partner, who never withdraws his capital from our concern, yet demands but an inappreciable share in the profits. So though Mortimer trudges over moor and fell, through tangled bracken, stout heather-clumps, and swollen peat-streams, cursing villanous saltpetre, and setting down your keen sportsmen as but very sorry company, this same benevolent Time seems to be doing him a good turn or two. The circle at Sleuthmere Cover found him more entertaining than he found them; and Mr. Dyneley would not hear of his departure. He was very good talk, they all thought; and he never vexed any of them by making a very big bag, or bringing home a bursting net. From this prolonged residence under

his cousin's roof, he acquired more thorough knowledge of his ways, and especially of those, previously alluded to, which were known to old Dyneley's intimates but completely hidden from the rest of the world. But though not much to Mortimer's taste, they were ways which, fortunately, women easily forgive, and men, unfortunately, esteem not to require forgiveness at all. Indeed, Mortimer was not amused; but he could not well proclaim himself bored, and so had to remain where he was.

But one sharp Sunday afternoon, as the good folks at Beadon were coming out of church, the mistress of the Priory seized upon Mr. George Forrester in a more than usually determined manner, asked for his arm, and walked off with him bodily. She soon commenced the attempt to possess him mentally also.

'How is it, George,' she began, 'that we have seen so little of you of late?'

The charge was true. But Forrester did not any the less affect, as men invariably affect on such occasions, to pooh-pooh it. Had he been there less of late? Really, he did not think so. Perhaps,

he had not been *quite* so often; but it was a busy time, and—and—and—

'And nothing, my dear George. Now, you know what I say is true. You have *not* been to the Priory much recently, and I want to know why.'

'Well, even if it be true that you have not seen me *quite* so much, there is no reason for it, I am sure; no reason at all.'

'If there is not, it is very strange. For both myself and my brother have noticed it, and have talked it over three or four times. You know how fond we both are of you, and how delighted always to see you. And we have missed you, and noticed your absence I say—yes, and talked it over. Of course Isabelle has not said much about it, as of course it would not be proper for her to do. But she did say, when I asked her the other day, if she did not think it strange we had not seen you for ten days, that you certainly used to come more frequently.'

'Did she really?' said poor baited George, trying to laugh, but succeeding only in a very weak, silly manner.

'She did indeed, and I am not surprised. Of

course, she must have noticed it. Now, my dear George, I think it is time that I should tell you that I and my brother have all along imagined that you were thinking of Isabelle. Indeed, we could not help thinking so. You have come so often, and have been so friendly, and altogether behaved in such a manner as to leave that impression. I feel I am justified in asking you if such are or are not your intentions? In fact, it is time that we should know.'

There was no loophole of retreat. If he said that he had no such intentions, he saw plainly enough what would be his fate. There was another alternative certainly, about which he must indeed have been a fool if he supposed there need be any fear. Still he hummed and hawed, and hesitated, and sprawled about every plank she threw out to him, without ever getting nearer to land. At last, it came out. Incoherently; but this was the gist of it. He had entertained such intentions, but—he had abandoned them.

From bad to worse. As if this would save him. He must have been a double-distilled blockhead, if he imagined that he would be able to ride off on

this avowal. It only prompted further questioning. He would have to explain his explanation. It was mighty hard work; awfully disagreeable. But, it had to be done.

It amounted to this. He had, one day some little time ago, taken courage, not to propose to Miss Chesterton, but to say one of those stupid stock tentative things with which your ordinary lover breaks ground. She had taken it up at once. She had appealed to his loyalty, he said. She concluded that he was beginning to care for her. She begged—she implored—him not to do so. Why, he had asked? Frankly, she had answered, because she did not nor ever could in the slightest degree think of him as more than friend. If he would be this to her, she would be grateful for ever.

And what had he done?

He had responded to her appeal. Loyally had he replied. He had promised to be her friend.

'O George! how stupid of you! indeed, how wrong of you! How wrong to say anything to Isabelle before speaking to me or to my brother. You see what you have done. It is not irreme-

diable, but it is annoying in the extreme. She is a mere child, not fit to be consulted in such matters. It was very wrong of you—exceedingly wrong of you. Indeed, I feel very angry.' And the poor fellow felt more uncomfortable by a good deal, even than when Miss Chesterton had pulled him up in his first attempt at sentimental bolting.

'However,' she went on, 'we must make the best of it. You have done a very stupid thing, and a very wrong thing; but it is done. But you must attach no further importance to it. Isabelle is a mere child. Come just as you came before, and it will be yet all right.'

Forrester had something to say, evidently; but he was not a good hand at saying anything quickly, and a still worse hand at saying it quickly when it was not very agreeable to say. Mrs. Thatchley, however, gave him no opportunity of saying it at all. They were approaching the Priory, and she halted for Mr. Chesterton and Isabelle to join them.

So that it seemed as though Time had at least been trying to do Mortimer a good turn in his absence. The converse held in Alwoodley Chase

had borne fruit of some sort. Miss Chesterton had followed his advice, and the immediate result was as favourable and decided as, had he known it, he could possibly have anticipated. But what would be the final result, was yet another matter. His opponent had met the move, when it came, with marvellous dexterity. It was the first little advantage he had gained over her. She seemed quite determined, and not altogether unable, to countervail it. For the present, too, she had command of the position. He no more knew that the move suggested by him had been played, than she knew by whom the move just played had been suggested. But she had become fully aware of its importance, and had plenty of time to counteract it.

Mortimer had calculated, in his parting conversation with Guy Bracebridge, that he should not be in the south again much before Christmas. But Christmas came, and the Sleuthmere carousals at Yuletide were a pretext for still longer detaining him among the north-country sportsmen. He had to stay with the best grace he could. An event, too, had occurred which, while it made him still more anxious to depart, rendered it still more

impossible for him to manifest an unwillingness to stay. What this was will be best described in the first interview, after his return, with Grattan Horncastle. This did not take place till February.

He had twice attempted, but in vain, to get at him. To his knocks at the door of the new chambers came no reply.

'It's not a bit of use,' said Bracebridge, 'not a bit. If you really want to see him, you must write; and then—even then—you must not be sure that you will get any answer. *I* can't get to see him; nobody can get to see him; nobody. To tell you the truth'—and here his manner assumed a solemnity almost too comic for Mortimer's gravity—'it's my opinion he's married. Married. That's my opinion.'

'To whom?'

'Oh, God knows to whom. To whom? That's another matter. But you mark my words. Horncastle's married. Married. Well—that's *my* opinion.'

'But what makes you think so?'

'Think so! I don't think so; I'm sure of it. Sure of it. There! Why, of course, he's married.

Where he was, or what he was doing all the Long Vacation—yes, and since, and since—*I* don't know. No, and nobody knows—nobody. But the first time I got into his rooms after the Long—and devilish hard work I had to get in, I can tell you, devilish hard work—the very first time—never since, mind you, never since—the very first time, I saw what I say is his wife; his wife—of course she's his wife: but, at any rate, a girl, and a devilish clever girl, I can tell you. He said she was a near connection of his, who was stopping with her aunt, who was also in town, for a short time. For a short time. But the *aunt* wasn't there. Of course there's no aunt. A near connection of his, and she had come to dine with him! Dine with him. And *I* dined with him. Such a dinner as you never saw. Oh—but *you* know Horncastle. Well—such a dinner. I've never seen her since. Indeed, I've never been able to get into his chambers since: not get into them. But I saw quite enough to know that she's his wife. Why, of course she's his wife.'

'But what was she like?'

'Oh, very nice—very nice. When I say very

nice, I don't mean she was anything very extraordinary—very extraordinary: but nice. Nice. And clever! Ah! I can tell you she's as clever as Horncastle himself; and that's saying a good deal. If she's not married to him, never believe me again; that's all. Why, of course she's married to him.'

'But you say you never saw her there but once.'

'No; that's just it. I never saw her there but once, because I've never — well, twice, perhaps, twice — been in his rooms since. But I know she's there. Everybody knows she's *there*. Everybody.'

'But does everybody say she is his wife?'

'No. Everybody says she's not. But then they haven't seen her; and *I* have: *I* have. And they don't know Horncastle; and *I* do: *I* do. *They* said he wouldn't get in for Veerborough.' Poor Guy forgot that he, too, had always maintained to Mortimer that Horncastle would not get in. '*They* said *that*. But *I* knew he would get in. What do they know about it? Well, I may be wrong. May be, I say. But I'm not. You mark my words if I am. You'll see; you'll see.'

'But what could induce him to marry her? I suppose she has no money; at any rate, not a fortune. And Horncastle is not the man to do such a foolish thing, particularly at present, when he must want money himself.'

'Want money! I should think he *did* want money. Of course, *she* hasn't got any money. But what of that? She's a devilish clever woman, I can tell you; and I've no doubt she's very useful to him. If she hasn't any money—which she hasn't—she gets him some, or, what's the same thing, just the same thing, saves it for him. *She* cooked that dinner. Of course, she cooked that dinner. *I* know that. Why, she said she did, or as much. As much. Depend upon it, she always cooks his dinner, and does a dozen things for him. A dozen things. *I* know what a clever woman can do for a fellow. Ah! I wish I had one to do so for me. And fellows say she's not married to him! But they haven't seen her; and *I* have. *I* have. And *I* know whether she's not married to him. Mind you, I don't say to *them* that he's married to her. I say nothing to *them*. Nothing. They say that he's not married to her; and I say

nothing. But I know whether he is or not; that's all.'

It was quite evident that Guy's facts were as much exhausted as his conviction arising from them was unshaken. Mortimer took both for what he thought they were worth, and satisfied himself with following his odd friend's advice, and writing to Horncastle and asking for an appointment. The answer came at once:—

'My dear Boy,—I am delighted to hear you are in the south again. I am most anxious to see you. Come to my rooms either to-night or to-morrow, at half-past eight.—Yours ever,

'Grattan Horncastle.'

Mortimer had not yet gone down to Gracewood, but was still in town; so that night, after dinner, punctual to the hour appointed, he mounted Horncastle's staircase, to meet with as cordial a welcome as one man ever received at the hands of another.

'Well, old fellow, what news?'

'Great news!' said Mortimer. 'My cousin has given me fifteen hundred a-year, and is ready to strain every nerve to get me into Parliament.'

CHAPTER VII.

'SPLENDID, my dear fellow! Magnificent! Nothing could be better. The very thing. The thing I urged all along to you. He was sure to do it. But tell me, what has been the arrangement?'

'How do you mean?'

'Who has given way—he or you?'

'He, to be sure. But the whole thing is the result of an accident. You remember our talking about the opposition raised against my cousin at the General, and my telling you how mad he would be?'

'Yes; perfectly.'

'Well, now, you must not be angry with old Bracebridge—'

'Not a bit. What is it?'

'He told me what you had told him about your knowing that Tuck was sent down by the Party.'

'Just like him. He can keep nothing.'

'I never intended to say anything about it, though *I* was not told it in confidence.'

'But I trust you did not mention *my* name?'

'Of course not. Bracebridge told me I must not do that, and I should have known as much as that without his telling me. However, I had nearly forgotten all about it when, a few weeks ago, some of the men staying at Sleuthmere began chaffing my cousin on the subject after dinner. I thought it a good opportunity of telling him what I consider a disgraceful thing for your people to have done.'

'So it was—for *them* to do. Well?'

'He took it very well at the time; but when we were alone the next day, he opened out to me, and asked me if I was quite sure. I said I was sure as a man well could be; that I had it on authority, at once good and with no motive to deceive.'

'But did he not want to know the authority?'

'Yes; but I told him I could not possibly tell him, and he was satisfied. But his rage! By Jove! Did I care to go into the House? he asked. He knew my political principles, and that they were

not quite the same as his, but that was no matter. He would get me in the very first opportunity, and I was to be on the look-out.'

'Excellent! Splendid! What a lucky thing!'

'If I get in, it will be a man lost to your side, and a man gained to the other. We shall sit facing each other, Grattan.'

'Oh, that's nothing. There are only two sides, and a fellow must sit on one or the other; and parties, and cries, and principles change so. Who knows but what we may sit on the same side before long? But what about the money?'

'That was done at the same time. He said he knew I should require a decent income, and that, if I thought it enough, he would allow me fifteen hundred a-year from this out.'

'Really, he is a brick, is the old boy. I don't think he likes *me* very much. He's always very civil in the House, and when we meet; but he has never asked me again since you took me to dinner, you remember?'

'What of that? I dare say he does not *much* care for you. But then, rich men usually do not like to see people get on without the influence of

money, as you are doing. It rather strikes at their own merits.'

'Just so. But, as you say, what does it matter? I am delighted—delighted, my dear boy. You must take to politics in earnest, and rush to the front. As I have often told you, you are really—without humbug—the cleverest fellow I know, and you ought to do wonders. You are the very man for the House. Your power of language, your original views, your — Oh, my dear fellow, it's splendid. We must pull together, even if we do continue to sit on opposite sides. Like the Dioscuri, sir, we'll leave the marks of our hoofs on the capitol!'

Words do not and cannot be made to express the buoyant elasticity with which those sentences were uttered. There was about Grattan Horncastle's ordinary manner a calm yet cheerful confidence that vexed some, convinced many, but impressed all. But when, retaining the confidence, he threw aside the calmness for an almost boyish fervour, which seemed even still more natural, there was something about him irresistibly winning. Mortimer liked him infinitely above all the men of his acquaintance. Indeed, Horncastle was probably the

only man whom he could be said to love. I do not think that he was in the slightest degree moved thereto by his friend's frankly-outspoken and often-repeated admiration, though it is scarcely likely that he was not agreeably and affectionately influenced by knowing that Horncastle fully appreciated him. Women can gain men's love by flattering them. Men can only hope, by the same means, to retain it.

'And what are you going to do? You must put yourself into communication with the proper people. You know who are the Conservative agents.'

'Yes; my cousin told me, and advised me to call and state my views.'

'Of course you must. And I will manage somehow to get one or two men on that side to speak about it. We are in a miserable minority now, and I shouldn't wonder if the Tories are not so circumspect and keen as they would be if they were not in such strength. But they will be delighted to have *you* in, I am sure. You see about it at once. You will remain in town now, of course?'

'No; I cannot do that. I shall be a good deal backwards and forwards. I prefer being at Gracewood, and really think it the best place for me for

the present. I can study more quietly there ; and I have a great deal to read up before being fit for a senator.'

'Oh, that's soon done.'

'Not so soon. Besides, I have another motive. I am going to tell you a secret, in strict confidence, that I have not yet mentioned to a soul.'

'Yes?'

'There is a girl, a Miss Chesterton, about ten miles from my place, exceedingly charming. I know her people very well, though I do not see much of her, and of course have not seen anything of her or them for the last four months. I don't mean to say, mind, that I am desperately in love with her, or, indeed, in love with her at all. It would be funny if I were, for I have never been alone with her but three times, and nothing affectionate has ever passed between us that I know of. But I like her very much, and think well of her, and am considerably interested.'

This sort of talk, I am well aware, will be to some silly men and to most sensible women rather offensive. The former I need not notice. But I would gently tell the latter that they must be

good enough to bear with that division of our sex who are not given to crying for the moon, when they have once got out of long clothes. This division does not consist, I pray them to believe me, of disappointed cynics, disciples of the Exchange, cold calculators, and hard-hearted egotists, who are ignorant of, and insensible to, the charm of emotional passion. It contains some right honest fellows, with hearts pretty much in the ordinary place; who take a generous estimate of the value of sentiment; who would not for worlds banish out of life sunsets, or smiles, or any other sweet thing; who can work hard, contend with difficulties, love well and truly and right on to the last, and whose arms the best women that ever lived might fare worse than to feel clasped firmly about them. Only they are not moonstruck. Endymion was a lucky fellow, but there has never been but one such that I have heard tell of; and they for their part are going to try stoutly for what earthly thing they can reasonably hope to get, but not to rave about it overmuch *before* they have got it. When it is got, the good Gods will be thanked duly, and perhaps a little moderate raving done too.

Mortimer, then, belonging to this veteran division, and not being a sheer raw recruit, went on thus-wise.

'Very much interested in her. It certainly is rather a difficult matter to make up one's mind about a girl whom one never sees except in the presence of other people, and those people determined to prevent her from displaying herself in her natural colours. Now, Mrs. Thatchley is the very devil, and that's all about it. She has brought up the girl infernally, simply; regularly drills her, and supervises her, and watches her to this day as though she were nine instead of nineteen. That is why I so seldom see her; and when I do see her, it is to very little purpose. But what I have seen of her when alone, joined to the interest I take in her confounded position, makes me very—well, yes—very fond of her.'

'Is she fond of *you?*' asked the other.

'I have scarce a right to form an opinion.'

'Well, but of course she is.'

'Ah! that is our way. We get into the habit of presuming that women are fond of us. All that I know is, they want her to marry somebody else—

a very good fellow, but a muff—and she tells me she never will. Her marrying me, supposing that I made up my mind to go in for it, would be objected to strenuously, or would have been, by her parents. But they are like the rest of the world; and I cannot help thinking that a seat in the House, and fifteen hundred a-year would smooth away a good many difficulties. Now you know another reason for my being so much pleased with my cousin's offer, and for my wish not to be too much away from Gracewood.'

They both were standing up, and Horncastle was walking about. Indeed, he was never completely at rest, save under compulsion. So that, had Mortimer been watching his face—and it never entered his head to do anything of the kind—he would not have been able to see the expression which, at that moment, came over it. Suddenly he turned.

'Has she any money?'

'Not a farthing, I should think. Of course, I know nothing; but I should not suppose old Chesterton could give her anything, or even leave her much.'

'Not a fortune, then?'

'Most certainly not.'

'Ah! my dear fellow! a mistake, a regular mistake. Here you have got a start, the finest start in the world, and you are going to handicap yourself in the most unnecessary and ruinous manner. I tell you plainly, you ought to be Prime Minister some day; and there's no earthly excuse for you, if you are not. What is there to prevent you? Nothing but an unwise marriage. If you only keep yourself free to make full use of your opportunities, and stick to it and to your cousin, he will increase your allowance, and finally leave you all his fortune. By the time you are fit and have just pretentions to be a Secretary of State, he *must* go in the ordinary course of things. And then you will have ten or fifteen thousand a-year, and an excellent chance of going in for the Seals. Fifteen hundred a-year is a very nice thing, no doubt. But if you marry now—unless the woman has a large fortune—she will not assist and can only hamper you. And by the time you fall into your cousin's fortune, you will scarcely have made your start, much less conquered all your difficulties

this side the winning-post. It would be death, my dear fellow—death!'

'You considerably overrate,' said Mortimer, 'both my powers and my opportunities, though I never affected to think meanly of the former, and now fully see the excellence of the latter. A much less dazzling future than the one you paint would, I think, prove that I had made a satisfactory use of both. But taking either view, your more extensive or my more limited one, I do not see that the income which I shall at once possess, will not suffice to carry it out.'

'As a bachelor, perhaps.'

'Yes, or as a married man. The world has gone temporarily—I cannot believe it will prove to be permanently—mad in its pursuit of display. The rising to the surface of so many people whose early days were spent in obscurity, the sudden accession of inordinate wealth to those who were once acquainted with penury, joined to their consciousness of inability to shine socially by any personal gifts—these are sufficient to account for the disreputable rivalry in expenditure which is the characteristic feature of modern Western civiliz-

ation. Many of those who, easy from birth in their circumstances and furnished by their education with worthier means of becoming distinguished, ought to know better than to join in the vulgar struggle, are too weak, or themselves too empty-headed to attempt to stem the current. Therefore they swell it. But what is the duty of the man who is neither particularly empty-headed nor particularly weak? It is clear that his duty is to confront it; actively, where he wisely can; but passively, always.'

'At his peril, mind you.'

'Personal peril,' answered Mortimer, fully seizing the drift and force of the remark, but exemplifying the principle for which he was contending, by the way in which he replied to it—'personal peril usually accompanies the persistent pursuit of duty; and, no doubt, a man who even quietly sets himself against the social torrent of his time runs the risk of being swept either with it or *out* of it. *Rusticus expectat dum defluat amnis.* Pardon the novel, since spontaneous, application. The man of simple manners wisely waits till *that* current has gone by, and better times shall come.'

'But are *you* ready,' asked Horncastle, 'to be swept out of the stream and left standing in some stagnant shallow till a change, not likely to come in your time, shall arrive?'

'Quite ready, if it be necessary; but your remark has forced me, in my reply, a little away from what I was urging. I said it was a man's duty to stem actively where he could, and passively when he could not, the moneyed phrensy which is carrying away the body and making sad havoc with the brains of the time. I believe it can be done, by moderately strong men, even without exorbitant risk. I, at least, intend to try. I will succeed legitimately, or not at all; and I would no more accept the favour or servility of politicians offered by reason of my wealth, than for the same reason the cringing of lacqueys; and he who wins, in a contest against the vices of his age, leaves virtue a better name, since a better chance, with the age that comes after. A man who leaves such a legacy can afford to die poor.'

'Admirably true, and admirably put,' answered the other, who never contradicted whom he intended to convince; 'and were you to remain single, your

doctrine would not only be noble and even plausible, but perfectly practical. As long as you continue a bachelor, you can resist your century, and yet command it. Look at *me!* Not much luxury, here. No one can accuse me,' and he laughed, 'either of vying with or even yielding to the plutocratic practices of our golden age. And I intend to succeed.'

Bracebridge's theory rushed to Mortimer's mind, and he saw the opportunity of putting a leading question, with the remark—'Without marrying?' But he was too delicate, and let it pass. Horncastle continued:

'*I* intend to succeed. But who asks where I live, and how I live? A few inquisitive people perhaps may, but their curiosity is of little moment. If I get on, it will become greater and of somewhat more moment. Let us hope that by that time I shall be better able to satisfy it; but even then, as long as I do not set up an establishment, I can preserve moderation in my expenses, without subjecting myself to criticism or disadvantage. But you! You have one establishment already, and you will, if you marry, at once want another—a town

one. And then think of *your* habits, your tastes, your terrible fastidiousness. See there! Yesterday's newspaper makes me a very tolerable table-cloth, and my *menu* requires no painting. I have no eye, ear, touch, ever on the alert for something inharmonious. Many shallow people would taunt you with the remark that you, with your rage for the agreeable, are the last person who ought to complain of luxury and expenditure. The taunt would be stupid and unjust. I know that taste and display are as different in their cost as in their character. The first can be gratified with a very moderate income. Still, nothing would compensate you for not having it gratified, and your income would, at present, be sufficient for the purpose; but in making those two ends meet, most of your time and consideration would necessarily be expended. Supposing that you found, by indulging at once in ambition and a wife, that your means were wholly demanded for the sheer necessities of both, what then? An entourage without grace would fill you with disgust. I verily believe that you would shrink from a seat on the Treasury Bench to-morrow, if it were covered with a wrong-

coloured velvet; and were you to find that the necessary expenses of a seat in the House interfered with the refringing of your curtain, I am sure you would abandon the reconstruction of the finances of an empire in order to adjust the æsthetic economy of a cottage. My dear Mortimer, you know I speak the truth.'

What a wonderful fellow! There were other arguments which came into his head, and which other men would have been sure to urge. He took good care not even to hint at them. That divisions are influenced by expensive entertainments, wavering votes decided by an oblong card, damaging philippics relegated to drawers at the bidding of a judicious invitation, cabinets saved by a pudding, and empires ruined by a sauce, he knew or believed as thoroughly as most men; but, unlike most men, he would have bitten out his tongue sooner than have allowed it to urge such arguments to Mortimer. He knew it would have been to throw up the cards. To tell Mortimer that he must have money in order to provide for salacious senators the apparatus of Persia, for their wives the approach to successive salons, for their daughters

the matrimonial sweepstakes of the Dance, that he would have to subscribe to everything which had the courage to call itself a charity, and contribute to testimonials to every man who wanted a character —to tell him these, would have been to provoke a thunderous silence or a hailstorm of scorn. To suggest to him the adoption of the vices of his neighbours would only infuriate his moral sense, and so obscure his judgment. To point out to him the necessary consequences of his own virtues, was to soothe and flatter the first without abandoning influence over the second.

'There is much in what you say,' answered Mortimer, 'and I do not fail to give it weight. Still, whilst clinging, as cling I must, to my idea of having one's artistic sense satisfied at the least possible expense, I am not at all sure that a wife—properly chosen—would not promote rather than encumber the process.'

'Perhaps; but not the ambition, my boy—not the ambition. I do not use the word to you in its vulgar sense; I speak of the first—not last—infirmity of noble minds. And, mark me—nay, you know it—drenched with artistic dews as is your

nature, you are also capable—indeed, not only capable, but cut out for action. Does not a personal capacity entail a public obligation? I think you may properly ask yourself that question, too, and will readily pardon me for suggesting it.'

Too readily. It was not often that Mortimer had the gratification of hearing his friend prate of the moral instinct or anything akin. I wonder if it astonished him to hear it now. Probably it pleased him too much to excite marvel, much less suspicion.

'But action—permanent, fruitful action—will be impossible, on your chimerical terms. You do not want to be only a passive, sleepy politician; you would surely strive to be a beneficent statesman. In trying to carry out your views—your profound social views, shared in by so few—can you afford to fling aside the adventitious aids which the loftiest virtue has hitherto deemed it honourable to accept? Obstacles there will be in plenty. You cannot afford to discountenance natural allies. No, no; no wife at present, except with money. I do not ask you—Heaven forbid!—to marry anyone whom you do not love. I do not even ask you not to

marry some one whom you do love. You confess that you are not in love with Miss Chesterton. I implore you not to take the unnecessary trouble to become so. Attend to your election at present. That won, then—To arms!—but not those of a woman! You will make rapid way. Everybody will admire you, and everybody's admiration will only the more thrust you upon the affection and interest of your cousin. In due time, as I say, you will have more of his great wealth, and finally all. And then, my boy, marry whom you like. But not now; not now. It would be ruin.'

So spoke one, and so the other. Incapable as was Mortimer of calculating on Mr. Dyneley's death, or even on a larger usufruct of his fortune during life, he was equally incapable of not seeing the arguments that might be drawn from such presumptions, especially when they were put by so deft a dialectician as Grattan Horncastle. Ambition is more catching than is usually supposed, though the infection, owing to the weakness of the subject, is often but transitory. When, however, a powerful nature is superadded to proximity of age and of friendship, the virus is much more likely to seize

swift hold and maintain longer dominion. *Proximus ardet.* When Horncastle was in one of his blazing fits, it was difficult for Mortimer not to feel all aglow.

Still, this latter part of their conversation had no conclusive issue, and was only closed by Mortimer's renewed injunction of secrecy.

'I have really been very egotistical. Tell me now something of yourself. How have you been getting on?'

'Oh, splendidly; but for the most part quietly. I had invitations down to Whigham, and to Whipford, and to Telldeep, and one or two other places during the autumn. Everybody was immensely civil. Since then, I have been here, reading up, as you perceive, on every subject under the sun.'

There was no mistake about it. The room, though a large one, was almost impassable for pamphlets, blue-books, newspapers, journals, reports, evidence before this commission and that commission, statistics, returns, letters, everything that can be written or printed, tumbled together anyhow. But that all were important, Mortimer felt sure; and that Horncastle made use of all was evident by

the loose but numerous sheets of foolscap covered with his notes, matted among the tangled heap of chaotic information. It was a huge storehouse of facts, and was quite cosmical enough for its practical possessor.

'Every subject under the sun.' And he plunged his arm into what would have seemed to anybody else a lottery, but from which, at every plunge, he pulled up the thing he named. 'Board of Trade. Hop Plantations. Evidence before the Charity Commissioners. Sugar in Bond. Incidence of Indirect Taxation. Railway Powers. Everything, sir! and in admirable order.' And he gave a hearty, broad-chested laugh, in which Mortimer less noisily, but most cordially joined.

'By the way, old boy, do you mind—*I* don't mind asking you, now that you're a millionaire, though there is not the slightest risk—do you mind backing a bill of mine for three hundred pounds?'

'Not in the least, if it be all right.'

'Yes, it's all right. I owe this fellow some money, arising out of election expenses and one or two other things, and I cannot give it him in cash

just now. My uncle in the north has been very kind; so I don't like to ask him for more. I can pay it when it is due. Reasonable interest, considering. Only six.'

'All right. Very happy.'

And Mortimer signed, and went.

'Mind, you're up soon, and write to me. Write beforehand, and make an appointment. A lot of fellows are always coming with letters and plans and petitions, and I want to work. So I always keep my door hermetically sealed.'

'So says Bracebridge.'

Horncastle laughed. He was standing at the door, letting out his visitor.

'Poor Bracebridge! A capital fellow. But then he would always be here. I see him often. But you—you always drop me a line, and then you'll be sure to find me in. You know how delighted I always am to see you. Good-by, old fellow; good-by! Many thanks.'

The outer door slung to with a reverberating noise, and through an inner one instantly slided a woman—young, comely, and sensibly clad.

'Was it Mortimer Dyneley, Grattan? was it?

It was! Oh, why did you not let me see him? I am so anxious to see him. What a delightful voice he has! What a shame not to let me see him!'

'Another time, Nelly!' And he wound his arm round her waist. 'Another time, and you shall see him. But we had so much to say, and of so much importance, I thought you were better out of it. But it's all right; the train is fired.'

'The Election business?'

'Yes, right as the mail.'

She clapped her hands, sedate as was her appearance and otherwise her manner.

'Capital. Oh! do tell me all about it.'

'Well, Mortimer told his cousin about the opposition got up at Pocketford; and old Dyneley is furious, and is going to put him in somewhere.'

'Famous! You always succeed;' and she pushed back his hair and kissed his forehead with a kiss of intimate belief. 'You always—always succeed.'

'Yes; but better still. His cousin has given him fifteen hundred a-year.'

'Glorious! It must be all right now.'

'Of course it is.'

'Well, and anything else?'

'No—nothing else. Surely, that is sufficient.'

'Yes, indeed, amply sufficient.'

Not a word, then, to her about Miss Chesterton? It seems not; but remember, did not Mortimer tell him *that*, in strict confidence? Pray do him justice.

'Now for some tea, old girl; and hold up bravely. It has taken eight months to effect this little stroke; but it is effected, you see.'

'Of course it is; and you know I never doubted but that it would be. Hold up! Did you ever see me down?'

'Never. You are the bravest Nelly that ever was;' and he returned her kiss. 'See; I must polish off this report. By the time tea is ready, I shall have finished.'

In a moment, he was deep in his work; and she, though making due preparations for their meal, was as silent as a mouse.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mortimer was once again at Gracewood, and alone. Winter was over certainly, but spring had not yet come. Trying equinoctial time, when the balance of sleep and of waking is so evenly kept, when the rights of torpor and growth are too evenly adjusted, and one almost turns back to the hard and sharp black frost, seeing that the soft green leaves are so slow to arrive. Gratifications are becoming few, just as wants are growing large. Man's animal strength waxes vigorous, and his palate keen but choice. Though the trusty gun must hang over the mantel-shelf, and there is no wild winged thing to spread upon the board, yet spring chickens are scarce in the farm-yard, and the glib salmon is still dear in market overt; whilst boating is as yet bitter cold work, and galloping in the teeth of an east wind seems like courting ingratitude. A detestable

time all over, making women look pinched, and men irritably fretful.

The impatience, evoked at this season by the laggard progress of the year, extends to the feelings touching any other advent desired but delayed. Mortimer was terribly under its influence. The buds would not burst round his cottage, no borough open to a dash would become vacated, and no face peeped through the bare brown branches. So, in inverse proportion, was the hurry in his heart, for the pink blossoms, for the free and independent constituency, for the golden hair and lithe little foot.

One of these would not be sufficient. Indeed two of the three would not be enough. He must have them all. The spring must shake all its wilful tresses loose, the magic letters must be added to his name, and then he might discover his fair and unforgotten enchantress, with some hope of propitiating her Gorgon. Without the sunny inducements of the first, the artist's nature could not well assume the lover's; and without the solid advantages of the second, he would probably assume it to very little purpose.

So Grattan Horncastle had not convinced him? Scarcely. Action was well, and what he wanted; but the 'calm grace' could not be abandoned. He had not thought himself sufficiently restless, to need the repose often found in action by those who, through reflection, have become not wiser, but only more bewildered. Meditation had led him up to the desire for constructive energy. Energy was the natural growth, not the unnatural refuge, from meditation. So that there was no necessity for his abdicating the majestic throne of the one in order to be permitted to mingle in the arena of the other. The impartiality of the young Commodus might be rivalled without at all sharing in his degradation.

Yet even in the equal struggles of the amphitheatre, the imperial purple should be seen hanging at least over the bench behind him. What availed all the past, if, in the manly contest, the practical effort were not informed and guided by the dexterous spirit of contemplation. He was anxious to prove himself a craftsman; but not by ceasing to be an artist, and an artist as much in his life as in his work. To construct elaborate arguments, sum

them up in polished perorations—nay, then to embody them in intelligible and beneficent legislation, even this would not have contented his scheme, if his own personal existence were compelled to be careless and chaotic; disfigured with debts he could not pay, and choked by demands which he could not discriminate and reduce to order. With every passion for rule, he would not consent to ride a whirlwind.

Could the individual life be really artistic and complete, unless partially domestic? A man may still remain a man without becoming either a soldier, a senator, or a poet. But without a wife? without children? It is not to be human. Indeed, such cannot properly be classed in the animal kingdom. A man is compelled, by no law, to be a demigod; but, by every law, he must not cease to be a mammal.

And this money question, upon which Horncastle dwelt with so much insistance? Look what he had done at Gracewood with his five hundred a-year. Surely, three times that amount, spent in the same spirit of search for beauty and of scorn for ostentation, would bear him in Parliament, with a wife by

his side, and all the sweet attendant consequences; and if he found it would not, well—politics might be foregone. But the rigorous law of harmonious grace could never be outraged.

Yet, no politics, no wife; or not the wife too long considered to be suddenly set aside.

In that case, both.

Such were Mortimer's reflections, uttered to no one, and therefore reported in the thinking-aloud form as above. Good reasoning or ill, it was his own, and it satisfied him. Upon it he was prepared to act.

The first time he called at Beadon Priory, the Chestertons were not at home. The second time he called, they were in London. He concluded that they had gone up to town for the day, and asked no further questions, only thinking himself, as he rode home, a very unlucky fellow. In ten days he called again. Confound it! he *would* see them. 'They were in London.' *Again* in London? No; *still* in London; they were staying there. Would they be there long? The servant really did not know.

When it did not blow, it rained; and when it did not rain, it blew; when he was not blinded with dust,

he was splashed with mud; when not splashed with mud, then blinded with dust; and the flowers would not come, and Gracewood looked perfectly horrid, and Mortimer began to think that Horncastle was right, and that for the present he would be much the best in London; so thither he went.

Once there, he was more at ease. He kept himself very quiet; saw this person and that about election prospects, industriously waded through blue-books, and recreated himself of an evening, when he could, at the Opera. Parliament was sitting, and indeed considering the startling financial plans which Sir Robert Peel had just unfolded to the new House of Commons, in that year of grace 1842. It had no more regular or sedulous attendant than Grattan Horncastle. Mortimer had given up his chambers in the Temple, and had taken lodgings at the west end. Thither Horncastle said it was quite convenient for him to come, and that he would so spare his friend the long eastward journey. He was always in the highest spirits, always thoroughly 'up' in the last question, and despite his youth and recent entry of the House, always baiting somebody on the Treasury Bench.

He was immensely anxious that Mortimer should get returned, and occasionally struck out pleasantly against any scheme of matrimony. Upon this subject, at present, Mortimer said little.

Bracebridge, also, of course he saw, and with him had much the same sort of talk as when they last met. As for Guy himself, of course everything was going to the dogs fast. Nothing would turn out right. He was the unluckiest beggar that ever was. That fool, his father, was a greater idiot than ever; and that scoundrel, his brother, had been pestering his life out. Horncastle! Oh, Horncastle! he never saw him—never! He was a devilish clever fellow, and seemed to be making a stir in the House, and that sort of thing. But nobody could get at him, and nobody could get his money; and everybody was talking, and he had not a chance of getting in for Veerborough again, and so on. He was delighted at Mortimer's prospects, and if he had only such a chance—but he hadn't. Brave, simple, very badly-treated Guy.

Standing one night at Her Majesty's, between the acts of the opera, with his back to the orchestra, and meanwhile using pretty freely his double-

barreled lorgnette, Mortimer espied, a considerable way up among the tiers, the clear outstanding face, with the aureole of golden tresses, of no other than Isabelle Chesterton, and the Gorgon, and the old boy. He could not run upstairs to them now, for everybody was sitting down again, and the curtain was just about to rise on Atto Secondo. But when it again fell, he marked the box and hurried off to it.

He was surprised at his reception. It was positively cordial. True, he had not seen them for nearly six months; but he felt pretty certain that an absence of sixty would not have made that saint in whalebone relax to such an extent without some motive. Mr. Chesterton seemed really pleased to see him; and the young lady, who looked still more lovely with her superadded half year and evening toilette, was as affectionate as is possible to one whose words are forced to be circumspect.

'I suppose you have just returned from the north,' said Mrs. Thatchley.

'Oh, dear, no! I have been back some two months—indeed, more. I have been three weeks in town; and I must have been at Gracewood some

five or six. I called at the Priory three times'—with a hasty glance at Miss Chesterton, who met it with one equally discreet—'but was never fortunate enough to find you at home. Your servant said that you were in London; but I concluded that you had gone up for the day, or at most for a day or two.'

Mortimer spoke most frankly, and really meant no more than he said. Any taunt was quite out of his thoughts. But Mrs. Thatchley's own conscience immediately suggested a defence to an accusation that had not been made, and certainly was not intended.

'Well, you see, a young girl must have some acquaintance with London life, and with the world generally. We are very quiet; but still I and my brother think it desirable that Isabelle should have the advantage of a little town society, and the Opera and concerts, and such like. As the phrase is—she is being brought out.'

Though Mortimer had not considered that their presence in London, though it surprised, needed to be explained, much less defended, to him, he could not fail to be amazed at this new state of things, more

especially when it was accounted for in such altogether novel language. Was this Puritanism in undress, or what? It had been his misfortune to have to listen by the hour together, when his legs were stretched under the oak dining-table at Beadon, to straight-laced dissertations, on the vanity of life, on the emptiness of urban pleasures, on the one thing necessary, on the frivolity of London girls, on the modesty which was so requisite to a maiden, and which could be maintained only under the lindens, and to kindred homilies on analogous topics. Here was a wondrous revolution! What mighty causes had set it going? The fact that Miss Chesterton's manner, for all the change of scene, was precisely the same as it used to be, only added to the perplexity of the riddle. This, however, was not the moment for seeking a solution.

'I am delighted to hear it,' he answered, bowing low. 'But I am obstinate enough to stick to my old cries, and am not at all inclined to lower my banner. *I* do not like London, and I neither much admire nor much reverence its pursuits. But nobody can know their worse than worthlessness till he has tried them. The convic-

tion which arises from anything but experience is every day liable to be shaken: by a change in the wind, by an acceleration of the blood, by many and indeed any trivial causes. Miss Chesterton would probably go on believing that the pleasures of a capital are the sweetest of all, so long as she had not for herself discovered that they are the most insipid.'

This sounded very much like a set speech: and there can be very little doubt that Mortimer meant every word of it to tell somewhere. The young lady never offered to take her eyes off him the whole time he spoke it; and the older one seemed as though she did not quite know where to put hers.

'You are rather severe, Mr. Dyneley, but you cannot expect a girl whose feelings are perfectly fresh, to regard scenes that are new to her with the disgust of one who has lived among them all his life.'

As this was not a reply to his former remark, he did not think it necessary to retort. What he had previously said was intended for Miss Chesterton, and for nobody else. She had heard it, and that was enough.

'So you are going to be very gay?'

'Pretty well. We have a great many invitations, all of which, of course, we cannot accept. We are going to a large party at Mr. Sleeper's to-morrow. Do you know him?'

'By name only. Everybody, I take it, has that much acquaintance with him.'

'I thought you knew everybody: and *he* is such a great man.'

'Far from it. My acquaintances never were many; and they have a tendency to become fewer rather than to increase.' Really he was very disagreeable to-night. Even Miss Chesterton half thought so. 'Are you going to remain in town all the season?'

'All the season, Mr. Dyneley! Of course not. We shall stop for a large garden-fête given by Mr. Sleeper, on the 10th of May; and then I think we shall go home. Shall we not, my dear?'

'Oh, I think so. I think we must,' answered 'my brother,' waking himself up to coincide with his sister as positively as was wise for him; knowing that he would have to change his opinion, if she

changed hers. 'I *think* we must return home by then.'

The music was about to recommence. He must return to his stall. They would be happy to see him, and gave their town address. Thanks. He would call. He made his adieux, stared hard at Miss Chesterton, who stared back hard at him, and bowed himself out.

At the end of the opera, he saw Mr. Dyneley in the entrance-hall.

'Hallo! Mortimer! You never came up to my box.'

'I did not see you.'

'I dare say not, you rascal. I saw you, though, and in a box with a very pretty girl.'

'Isn't she?' said Mortimer.

'Wonderful! Do you know her well? Who is she?'

'A Miss Chesterton. I know her people pretty well. They live near me in the country.'

'Oh, indeed. Any election news?'

'Nothing quite definite. But we have settled on three or four places which they tell me can be fought with a fair chance of success, should a vacancy occur in any of them.'

'Well, you cannot do more than that. Only keep a sharp look-out, and run no risk of defeat. We must beat the scoundrels. I'll pay them off, you'll see. Good-night.'

Mortimer was going.

'Heh! Mortimer.'

'Yes.'

'By-the-way, I have told my lawyer, when he sends you the half-year's cheque on the 21st, to draw it according to the new arrangement—seven hundred and fifty, you know.'

'Many thanks.'

'All right. Good-by, my boy.'

And the streets soon were cleared.

Mortimer was not long in calling, as he had promised. But the calls in London were almost as unsatisfactory as in the country; and he soon discovered that the people to whose houses Mrs. Thatchley was taking Isabelle, were quite outside his acquaintance. He was not keen enough to care to get to know them; and had he so cared, time would have been required for the purpose. As far as he could gather, they seemed to be new rich people, who were being brought prominently into

social notice by the great railway mania which had by this time fairly commenced. The Mr. Sleeper whom they had mentioned was distinguished in this rapidly increasing tribe. Mr. Chesterton's acquaintance with the great plutocrat arose out of the Board Meetings of a Company of which he had recently become a Director. And hence also followed his social relations with the set amongst whom Mortimer found that his wife and daughter were moving.

Sleeper was certainly a great man in the only sense understood by a century wherein Cato and his conquered cause would have cut a very sorry figure. Sleeper was a successful man. He had originally kept a public-house, which was quite as successful as any of the larger schemes which later on he took under his protection. Its very success was the cause of his abandoning it: for were there not other and larger lands to conquer? He sold the goodwill of it for a respectable sum; but his successor had not his dexterity, nor Mrs. Sleeper's plump hands to pass about the pots, and was speedily ruined. But before this last had destroyed by his want of ability the business which Sleeper had created, Sleeper

had still more splendidly succeeded in another. From pewter to iron is a short stride enough. And the man who had been the great Boniface of his province, was shortly heard of as the great Vulcan of his nation. At first providing but the material, he soon provided the capital out of which railways were to be made. The use of all opportunities gave him continual fresh ones; till the very mention of his name suggested three millions of money. He was not a bad fellow, and he really was not a swindler. He had made all his money by getting the better of his neighbour, but never by what is considered cheating him. He had found, not made, the ethics of his time; and in the strictest accordance with them, he had turned them to exceeding profit. He had won his earlier position by being intensely keen-fisted; his later and present position he maintained by being quite as intensely open-handed. He was a wise man and a philosophic, and had no vulgar preference for stinginess, and no sentimental one for generosity. He had not been parsimonious from meanness, and he was not now prodigal from benevolence. His money he had made by saving; but by spending he had acquired

his position. His views were not quite so large as his wealth, and he judged his neighbours by himself. I cannot say that he seriously wronged them.

He had the finest house in a district of London which was then rapidly approaching completion, and which is now the abodes of the blessed. But seven miles from town he had a palace, and to the palace was attached a garden that had jaundiced half even the territorial aristocracy of the land. Thither, these flocked in crowds, and at their heels the less noble but equally welcome commonalty of the realm. Sleeper was not yet a peer; but to do him justice, if he strove for the smiles of the class which he had almost reached, it was not for the purpose of sneering at the class which he had almost quitted. He was so rich and so much courted, that he could positively afford to tolerate his own antecedents; and he had succeeded too thoroughly not to know that nobody must be despised. Your wise lion has a great regard for mice.

Everybody was there on the 10th of May, 1842. Some very queer form of Dissent had originally held Sleeper in its communion, and still pointed to him as its production and its support; but bishops

— especially English bishops — are proverbially tolerant, and the Bench was largely represented. The dispossessed heirs of conquered Eastern provinces displayed upon their persons and on those of their suite the more than imperial fortunes which they had received in compensation for their superseded sway. Ambassadors from Asiatic isles hitherto known but to schoolgirls, but now first commencing to be recognized by statesmen, brought their dusky faces and placid though inquisitive eyes into the cosmopolitan crowd. Young orators were being complimented for their speeches; young beauties for the splendour of their charms; old dowagers for the magnificence of their toilettes. There were gems and intaglios, and medals and autographs, for learned or assuming dilettanti; old masters and old wines for connoisseurs; the last water-colours and the most cooling draughts for the more effervescing of the community. A Princess of the Blood walked through. Two Members of the Cabinet remained to the very last. The members of the Press, from the well-lined editor to the lean and almost-slippered reporter, found an equal and honourable reception. Some said that it was

owing to Sleeper's good-breeding; others, to his tact. It might be attributed to either; but it certainly was sufficient to justify the creditable imputation of both. All agreed that wit had never been so witty, beauty so beautiful, and splendour so splendid, as in this signal gathering at Notable House.

Mortimer (whatever his object) had taken the trouble—in this case but slight—to get an invitation. Mr. Dyneley was there; so was Grattan Horncastle; as were indeed full two-thirds of the Commons' House. Not among the latest to appear were the Chestertons, whom Mortimer, shortly after his own arrival, espied, and at once went to salute. A dress, simply but flawlessly made, of white muslin sparingly sprinkled with green sprays, and a bonnet whose colours accorded strictly with the rest of her attire, did sufficient justice to the unostentatious though remarkable beauty of the fair child from Beadon. Mortimer had just passed on from exchanging the first few words with his country friends to equally empty but equally required interchange of nothing with others of the shifting crowd, when he came upon Mr. Dyneley.

'Well; who is here, Mortimer?'

'Everybody, it seems. Do you remember asking me about a pretty girl that you saw me talking to in a box at the Opera, one night?'

'Perfectly. Is she here?'

'Yes; and I want to introduce you to her father and mother—or half-aunt in reality. They are close to, somewhere; I only just left them. Can you come, now?'

'Yes, with pleasure.'

'Please, be civil to them. I don't think the mother likes me overmuch, and—'

'And you *do* like the daughter, eh?'

'Well; yes.' And he laughed. 'Should I come and ask you for your blessing some day, you must not be surprised; so pay the old lady a little attention for me. See; here they are. Allow me to introduce Mr. Dyneley, my cousin, of whom you have heard me speak.'

'Of whom I have heard many people speak,' answered Mrs. Thatchley. It was scarcely true, though she might think it polite; but even your rigid Puritan, when she gets into society, is perhaps not much more truthful than her neighbours.

After a few preliminary courtesies of much the

same order as the above, Mr. Dyneley offered his arm to Mrs. Thatchley, saying that he would take her to see a most remarkable collection of ancient rings. Did she care for such things? Of course, for nothing so much. Mortimer would follow with Miss Chesterton. Papa was discussing Stock with somebody or other in an appropriate corner. Grateful as was Mortimer for any kindness done to him, he had never been able to feel genuinely warm affection for his cousin; but he thought he felt it now. No amount of money will win our love. The more indirect furtherance of our schemes is a shorter yet surer cut to our hearts. Old Dyneley was certainly behaving like a trump: he kept the mother on his arm; discoursed to her long if not learnedly of gems and amulets, whose wearers were long since dust; stopped often to greet and even to exchange words with his innumerable acquaintances; but never forgot the pleased matron on his arm, and introduced her in passing to several social celebrities, whenever the idle but to her delightful formula could properly be applied. Ever and anon she looked back, but always to see Miss Chesterton immediately behind.

The confidence acquired by these repeated ocular trials, followed by ocular proofs of their faithful proximity, joined moreover to the increasing intoxication of a pleasure she had never enjoyed before, made her at last less mindful of her maternal obligations. Moreover, when tents are many and intricate, flowers in these, ferns in those, groups of dancers in others, and there is an ever-moving crowd to increase the facility, it is not difficult for people temporarily to lose each other. So without accusing Mortimer of intentional escape, and without caring to defend Miss Chesterton against the possible imputation of too easily submitting to being lost, I simply chronicle the fact, that when, after unpardonably long negligence, Mrs. Thatchley looked round for the two whom she believed to be in her train, they were no longer visible. At first she was vulgarly solicitous. But old Dyneley had a quieting way with him; and as a Duke came up at the moment, he presented her to his Grace, and so removed her anxiety. His Grace said something courteous—he was one of our sweetest gentlemen—and passed on; but a succession of notables helped to maintain the fascination

under which the liberated Calvinist agreeably laboured.

Azaleas are lovely plants to look on, especially when they are seven feet high; but the purpose for which at present we most admire them is that of forming a most convenient and agreeable screen to the whispers of the Lost.

'The very first opportunity,' Miss Chesterton was saying, 'I followed your kind counsel implicitly, feeling how good and judicious it was. He behaved just like what you said he was—a loyal gentleman. Had it been possible to love him, I must have loved him then.'

'And you did not.'

'Impossible. After that, he did not come to the Priory so often, till, no doubt, it came to be remarked; and I rather suspect, though I know nothing, that mamma must have spoken to him on the subject. I cannot believe that, after his generous promises to me, he would ever of himself have mentioned the subject to her or anybody.'

'But what makes you think that Mrs. Thatchley spoke to him?'

'Because she very soon spoke to *me*. Indeed,

because of all that has followed. It would be idle and affected to pretend ignorance, when I have been too much interested for my guesses not to be pretty correct; and are we not pledged, Mr. Dyneley, to frankness?'

'The old bond,' said Mortimer; 'let it never be broken.'

'Be it so, gladly. Then may I tell you of what ensued, not in its miserable details—they would sound too mean and vulgar — but in its broad features. What indignities have I not suffered? I was accused of—I know not what; of urging Mr. Forrester on; of wringing from him an avowal; of wounding his feelings; of outraging the respect due to my own; of unfilial conduct; of *unwomanly* conduct.' Mortimer's heel was crushing a deep dint into the gravelly soil. 'Poor Mr. Forrester was driven up to me again—not in words, but in appearance—to his shame and to my misery; till, at last, I think he must have declared he would go forward no further. I had told them from the first that, be the consequences what they might, I would never yield on that or any similar point. How obedient I could be on all other points, they had

had some experience to enable them to decide. The battle—or scarcely the battle, the determined siege and the determined defence—lasted four months more.'

'And is now over?'

'Yes; *that* siege is over for ever, I think.'

'Has another commenced, then, or is it meditated?'

'Not that I know of.'

'What was Mrs. Thatchley's special object, do you think, in trying to force George Forrester upon you? Pardon me; he is well off, I suppose, but he cannot be *very* rich.'

'Perhaps not. But he is sufficiently—' she paused, as though she did not like the word—'sufficiently rich, and he is very, *very* manageable.'

'And you think that to have been the moving cause of her wishes?'

'One of the causes. Perhaps the other you have already named. But power—and especially power over *me*—is her mania. To subdue and control, direct and regulate *me*, has been the one steadily pursued purpose of twelve years. Dear papa yielded to her at once, and very likely, with-

out suffering from the surrender. *I* resisted; resisted outrageously, as I have long since—*so* long since, it seems—told you. The history of that resistance you know. Having beaten or appeared to beat me, she was not and is not likely to abandon the fruits of her victory without a struggle.'

'A conquest,' said Mortimer, 'as inglorious as it was deplorable. But Mrs. Thatchley is surely very religious?'

'Very. I hope you will understand me when I say that that makes matters infinitely worse. I find that when people can bring forward religious sanctions for their personal whims, they are proportionately obstinate in being disagreeable.'

Mortimer laughed, and exclaimed:

'Excellent! You have had plenty of time for thinking it all out; and you have arrived at some very subtle, but, I believe, very sound conclusions. But is this new movement a religious movement? What sanctions are there for bringing you into this mundane vortex about which you and I have heard some terrible things said, in our time? And what is the personal whim that has suggested the adven-

ture? I confess I have been and am considerably puzzled.'

The sweet and usually reposeful face broke into sunny merriment.

'I did not mean you to continue my illustration so far; but it was tempting. To tell the truth, I am almost as much puzzled as you can be. But I have read that when a general loses a battle, if he be skilful, he takes up a different position. The last engagement was a defeat; so you see a campaign is to be tried upon new ground. I can make nothing more of it.'

'Your explanation is plausible, but scarcely sufficient. I would suggest that, it having been discovered that you have a will of your own on one subject, you are being allowed a larger field for choice.'

'Choice! That is quite out of the question.'

'I do not mean to say that your choice would be necessarily accepted. Though Mrs. Thatchley may have become convinced that you will retain a right of veto on *her* choice, and will so no longer seem to exercise it, she will of course retain her right of veto upon yours. Still it is wise and

exceedingly good generalship to allow you apparently larger latitude in the hope that you will choose rightly, as long as your choosing wrongly can always be prevented.'

'I had not thought *that* out. But I am inclined, at once, to believe that you have made even a better guess than I have.'

'We are probably both not far wrong. And are you happier?'

'Happier!' she said, and the old sad-solemn tone came back. 'Can there be happiness without liberty?'

There was a pause; the first in the conversation of to-day; a pause such as, ever and anon, used to occur in their communes in leafy Alwoodley. Such pauses are more eloquent and more dangerous than a score of insinuating speeches.

They had been sitting. They rose, and he offered his arm, which she took.

'Liberty!' he said. The word had been so exclusively in his mind, though full five minutes had elapsed since she uttered it, that he took it up as though, that moment, it had dropped from her lips. 'Liberty! That is a cure in which few

people believe. Still, if it be not the panacea, we are doomed to endure our diseases. Perhaps it is a kill-or-cure treatment—'

'In either case,' she said, interrupting him with pathetic intensity—'in either case it would be welcome.'

He looked into her blue eyes, just moist with a mist that was forbidden to trespass and tremble into tears. He pressed her little rounded arm softly but sympathetically to his side. The magnetism of the moment compelled her to reflect it, though with one far gentler.

'*Cara mia*,' he said, 'let us see if we cannot cure and save you too.'

She smiled gratefully.

'You have proved my excellent counsel. You will find it more difficult to be my physician.'

'I think I see Mrs. Thatchley.'

'Then let us go to her, please.'

'Certainly; we will go at once.'

As he spoke, a familiar hand was on his shoulder.

'I wondered I had not seen you.'

'Hah! Grattan! How are you, old boy? Allow

me to introduce my most intimate friend, Mr. Horncastle.'

The three pushed on, and together joined Mrs. Thatchley, to whom also Mortimer introduced his friend. If any storm had been gathering in her breast, she lulled it till it could break more fittingly. Though society cannot bestow a sweet temper, it sometimes compels an approach to good manners. Mortimer took her in hand, leaving Horncastle to talk with the young lady.

'Your cousin is charming. I never met so agreeable a man. He has only just left me. I suppose he is very kind to you.'

'So kind,' said Mortimer, frankly, 'that I owe to him everything material that I possess.' An excellent opportunity had occurred for his telling her what he so much desired that she should know, and he did not let it pass. 'Everything material. And he has only just recently trebled my income and offers to defray all my expenses if I choose to contest a borough.'

'Really! And do you purpose doing so?'

'The very first opportunity. I am very anxious to be in the House of Commons.'

Did the thrust tell? It is easier to prevent a prejudice than to remove it. Mrs. Thatchley had formed her opinion of Mortimer Dyneley two years ago and more, when he was a young fellow with a small cottage, and whilst she had but a vague if indeed any notion of his relations with his cousin. At that time she had made up her mind that, though he was but very moderately provided for and terribly original and unmanageable, he entertained notions of some day marrying Isabelle; and she had equally made up her mind that Isabelle should be married to George Forrester, who was exceedingly well off and as docile as a spring. She made her estimate of Mortimer accordingly, and imagined and represented him as dangerous in order to prevent him from being so. Had he been poorer at the time, she would probably not have discovered his faults. Had he been richer, she would certainly have forgiven them. But as she felt that his income was perhaps large enough to justify him in being a pretender, and yet most certainly not large enough to induce her to acknowledge him as a rightful claimant, she was mighty quick in picking some most objectionable

flaws in his title. And though perhaps his increasing substance might cover a multitude of faults that her original charity could not, it was scarcely to be expected that the announcement of his improving fortunes would completely and at once obliterate the hostile impression formed when they were low, and maintained whilst they offered to rise no higher. Altogether, truth would perhaps be satisfied by stating that since her interview to-day with his cousin and his own skilful declaration to her of his real position, she thought he had greater merits than she had hitherto discovered.

'Do you remain much longer in town?'

'No; we go home on Monday, and shall hope to see you shortly.'

'Thanks; that you shall certainly do.'

Horncastle looked as though he was moving away. But before he walked on, he stopped to have a few words with Mrs. Thatchley, during which Mortimer managed to say to Isabelle:

'You go home on Monday?'

'I believe so.'

'I shall be in the Chase on Thursday.'

She answered him only with a slight inclination

of the head. Mr. Dyneley approached and offered her his arm. He wished to show her some splendid ferns. Horncastle, instead of taking his leave, walked by Mrs. Thatchley's side. Mortimer, liberated by the arrangement, went to do duty or seek entertainment elsewhere. He came upon his friends no more that day, but only saw in the distance, much to his satisfaction, Mr. Dyneley still attached to the Chestertons; and later on, rather to his surprise, his cousin and Horncastle in very friendly converse.

Sleeper had never been so triumphant. Everybody had gathered about him and everybody had been delighted. The day had been the finest, the sunset the softest, the music the best, the dresses the freshest, the flowers, fruits, meats, wines, the most perfect that moneyed prodigality could provide. The whole world said that Sleeper must become a Metropolitan Member.

But garden-fêtes will end, and even Sleeper's came to a close. Mortimer left whilst yet the varied entertainment scarcely flagged; but before leaving he had just a word or two with Horncastle.

'Well, what do you think of her?'

'Of whom?'

'Bah! You know. Of Miss Chesterton?'

'She is very nice, certainly; and very good-looking.'

'I see you have been hobnobbing with my cousin,' said Mortimer, shifting from the subject on which it was evident he was not going to receive much encouragement. 'I was very glad to see you together; for, to tell you the truth, I have been annoyed at his not taking more notice of one who I told him was my particular friend.'

'You know we Englishmen never run into each other's arms at once. We have had a famous talk. He has been complimenting me on my bringing forward my Soap Motion the other night. I can only tell you that he is devilish well-inclined to *you*, and will do anything for you if you only play your cards properly. He is immensely anxious to see you in Parliament, and believes, almost as much as I do, in the splendour of your future. But for God's sake keep off from the marrying business yet a bit. One such iron in the fire as the commencement of a political career is enough for a young man; unless you meet—I mean, love—a woman with money, or

unless old Dyneley would give you a handsome thing in marrying. You get on very well with him, but you cannot be sure that your wife would. At the best, it is introducing into the problem of life another perplexity. You hold your hand, and your tongue too, old boy.'

'It's no use, Grattan. You know how little impression you made on me before; and you are less likely to make any now. Indeed, I more than hinted to my cousin to-day of what was possibly coming. I hope to meet her in Alwoodley Chase again next Thursday; and, in the meantime, I shall think the matter well over.'

'Think it over; but think also of what I have said. Love is short; a career, long. Don't ruin yours for a boy's fancy. When do you leave town?'

'To-morrow; so as,' and he laughed, 'to give myself plenty of time for reflection. Good-by.' And he made his way towards the exit. Before reaching it, he stumbled on Mr. Dyneley.

'Hallo! Mortimer. Your friends are charming —particularly the young lady. I have asked them to dine at Richmond on Saturday week.'

'They told me they were going home on Monday.'

'So they are. But they have promised to come up on that day on purpose. You must be of the party, of course.'

'With infinite pleasure. You are much nearer, I can tell you, to being asked for your blessing than you were even five hours ago. I feel I am fascinated.'

Old Dyneley laughed.

'Your friend Horncastle is a much pleasanter fellow than I imagined. I confess I did not take a fancy to him when you brought him to dinner. But he is really a very agreeable, intelligent man, and made a capital speech the other night in the House. He is very intimate with you, is he not?'

'He is my most intimate friend. He invariably consults me, and I consult him, on everything.'

'I should think you could not have a shrewder adviser. Well then—Saturday week.'

'Yes, Saturday week at Richmond. What hour?'

'Seven. Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

And Mortimer went off. A few minutes later Mr. Dyneley met Horncastle.

'Can I give you a lift in my brougham back to town, Mr. Horncastle?'

'Thanks! You are very kind.'

'It is a good hour's drive; when were you thinking of going?'

'I am ready now.'

'Very well, then let us go.'

. . . . . .

'Will that do, Grattan?'

He read it carefully, and handed it back.

'Bravely, Nelly. You have not signed it, have you?'

'No; you said I must not.'

'Quite right. Now for the address.'

'Are you ready?'

'Yes.'

'Mrs. Thatchley.'

'Yes.'

'The Priory.'

'Yes.'

'Beadon.'

'Beadon. Is that all?'

'That's all.'

'Shall I run out and post it?'

'No, there's no use posting it to-night; it's after eleven. Besides, let me see, they don't go home till Monday. If we post it on Sunday, it will be soon enough. Better she should receive it down in the country.' He threw down the note. 'There, Mistress Nelly! You cannot do a friend a kinder turn than to save him from his own stupidity.'

'And ourselves, too,' she added, nestling her head in his bosom.

'And ourselves too, old girl. We will win yet, will we not?'

'*You* will,' she said.

'But the triumph shall be common. Do you doubt it?'

'Sometimes; but not when I am lying here.'

And the great city was locked fast in sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

Mortimer had returned into the country to find the year no longer hesitating. All doubts were over, for mid-May had brought its blossoming enfranchisement. Neither the bloom nor the foliage was perhaps so extravagant as the twelvemonth back, now recalled and pleasantly remembered. But it was full English springtide, and the world had grown young, and the woods were paradise.

There was nothing to disturb him now. He shared the rejuvenescence of the year. All his plans were in full bloom, and auspicious winds were blowing, which fairly promised them a fruitful maturity. Sleeper's garden-fête had been a tremendous godsend. It had given him the opportunity of learning from Miss Chesterton's own lips how thoroughly his advice regarding George Forrester had succeeded; how that obstacle, at least, had been honourably and finally removed; and of

guessing to what extent its removal, and the manner of its removal, had made Mrs. Thatchley more amenable to ordinary motives, and more tolerant of his own pretensions. It had afforded him an excellent occasion for a long conversation with the young lady which, commencing by being somewhat practical, ended by being somewhat sentimental. It had enabled him to follow up the announcement to him of poor Forrester's disaster with the announcement to Mrs. Thatchley of his own ameliorated prospects, and of fortifying the assertion by introducing to her their promoter. He had enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing that promoter—the man most willing, as he was the most likely and best able, to assist him—cheerfully act up to his request of endeavouring to win the person whom he now most desired to propitiate, and apparently and strikingly succeed in the endeavour. Believing his cousin not the man to make any great personal sacrifices for him or anybody else, he was gratified to think that Mr. Dyneley was favourably impressed with the people, and especially with the young lady, with whom he had also had the opportunity of averring to his cousin that he meditated seeking the closest

alliance. And finally, it had given him the prospect of a meeting with Miss Chesterton on Thursday, and the certainty of meeting her on the Saturday following. Grattan Horncastle, too, who would do anything on earth for him, had at last been treated by his cousin with marked cordiality, and had heard from Mr. Dyneley himself how thoroughly Mortimer's career was his study and his hope.

No wonder, then, that Gracewood seemed to him lovelier than ever. The roses had made tremendous running up the green trellis-work since the preceding year; fresh gravel had been put down upon the paths; new trees, planted during the autumn, now for the first time justified his foresight and discretion; all the plants were bedded out; and the lawn, short and close, looked as green as the slippery moss of some Naiad's watery nook. It wanted but one thing to make it perfect—a foot smaller and a tread softer than his own.

He was now too happy, and felt himself too much master of the position, to be impatient. Even should he ride the Chase to-day alone, he should come home and smoke his tchibouk very peaceably.

And even should he meet in the Chase her whom he undoubtedly went to seek, he was by no means bent upon more than gracious converse. There was no special need for hurry. A declaration such as he had now almost determined upon making must be spontaneous, and must for its opportunity depend largely upon circumstance. Besides, sufficiently fond as he had become, and sufficiently resolved as he was on the liberation, of Isabelle, he would not be sorry to acquire, through delicious delay, a more intimate acquaintance with her nature, and a truer knowledge of the obstacles which even yet undoubtedly surrounded her.

There was still another question which he tried to entertain as little as possible, but which was not absent from his mind. Though it was impossible for him to doubt that she had for him, as her friend, a remarkable attachment, was it at all sure—not that she already consciously loved him: *that* he was not vain enough to imagine, nor exacting enough to expect, but—that her love would be startled into life at sound of his? Intentional conquests of affection probably make men conceited; the unsought-for acquisition of it only leaves them passively con-

fident. Mortimer had never yet attempted to conquer easy or difficult hearts, but had in his time received the sweet spontaneous homage of a fair number of gentle breasts. So that, though it was impossible for him to be very diffident, he had no cause for being vainglorious. He acknowledged to himself that it was quite possible that Isabelle Chesterton might not be brought to love him, but it must in honesty be owned that he thought the odds were considerably in his favour.

Nor did he blink the old difficulty, now as he thought rendered slighter, but still unquestionably in existence, of Mrs. Thatchley's prejudices. Supposing that Dante should again prove right, that *Amor a nullo amato amar perdona*, and that so the utterance of his heart should strike a loving response in that of Isabelle, still parental sanction might be withheld, and parental opportunities, if not parental authority, would be sufficient to perplex if not to dissipate this amatory dream. With regard to Isabelle's declaration, made months ago, that she would obey in everything but attempted compulsion to an obnoxious union, and therefore would submit to the veto upon a desired one, Mortimer had really

no anxiety. He knew himself and Isabelle Chesterton well enough to be satisfied that, if she really came to love him, she would follow his will to the death. He would then tell her that a veto, in such case, it was duty to disregard.

Still, it might be a duty to disregard, but what would be the power to avoid it? Was he prepared to use stratagem and force combined? If his cousin backed him—unquestionably.

I am not going to stop to argue whether or not this be sound social morality, though it was his, and it is also mine: for he is in the saddle and away.

It was one long galop through perfume; nor, once in the heart of the Chase, had he long to wait. He scarcely expected that she would be able to come, but bright and clear, against the bushy trees and the farther outline, was the long stride of the welcome roan, and the floating hair of the desired one. Old Jeff trotted swiftly but sedately behind.

'It is time fortune turned,' he said, warmly greeting and greeted. 'Oh, the long months, that seemed such laggards!'

'How long were you in the north altogether?'

'Four months; and then two more here, whilst neither you nor the leaves would come.'

'Are they not beautiful?'

'Yes; both!' he said, raising his hat. 'Permit me to admire your new habit; though I have not forgotten my friaress grey. This is the result of your coming out?'

She remembered the explanatory speech at the Opera, and laughed.

'How do you like my friend, Grattan Horncastle?'

'The old bond?' she said, inquiringly.

'The old bond, always and for ever.'

'Then, not overmuch.'

'You surprise me.'

'Of course, I have seen but little of him. But, you know, it is difficult for women not to make rapid judgments; and, as I am pledged to frankness, I am obliged to enunciate mine. But I grant, that as you like him so much, there is every chance of my being wrong.'

'He is exceedingly clever.'

'Very, I should think.'

'And a thorough gentleman.'

'Quite so,' she said.

'He is immensely attached to me.'

'If he be, that is not any fault in my eyes.'

'Do you think he is not?'

'Honestly, I had not considered it; but I should think—yes, he must be *very* fond of you. He has the highest, and I have no doubt, the justest, estimate of your abilities.'

'What is his fault, then?'

'I have not analyzed him, and so am not prepared to stand so terrible an examination. I can only give you my general impression, resulting in a very indefinite idea. But I think I should object to him on the score of—am I right in calling it?—worldliness. He seems to me to imagine that people—you, of course, among the number—ought to live for the sole purpose of succeeding.'

'In a man, that is scarcely a fault.'

'Is it not?'

And there was silence. At last—

'And Mr. Dyneley? Did you like him better?'

'I said just now that women cannot avoid making rapid judgments; but I really made none concerning him, excepting that he was very kind.'

'I am punished for talking about other people. They are at all times but a vulgar subject.'

'You are not offended, Mr. Dyneley?'

'My dear Miss Chesterton, no! I meant what I said: namely, a rebuke to myself. This is better than Notable House.'

'Infinitely better.'

'Tell me; do you return from London caring more, or less, for it than when you went?'

'So much less that I should have some difficulty in telling you how much. I had a little curiosity to see it: it is quite satisfied. I do not care if I never see it again.'

'You are content to stay at Beadon?'

'It is better than Bond Street.'

'As long as the domestic conditions are the same in both.'

'Precisely; but let us not talk of *them*, except when I am in any special trouble, and I come to you to help me.'

'Good. I am glad you agree with my estimate of the comparative merits of town and country. I am not, as you know, what is usually called a religious man; but if you are tolerant enough—as

I am sure you are—to let me talk about religion, I I think that, now-a-days, the really religious life is almost impossible in cities. And a man who is not or does not desire to be religious, is either very wicked or very mad.'

'God seems more about one here.'

'And it is not only that. In modern cities, men seem so strong, such marvellous results are produced by human means and human co-operation, such hold have we of cause and effect, such obedient and mighty mechanism at our command, that God appears at best as a Sunday superfluity.'

'How true!'

'And that is terrible. In the country, on the contrary, He so evidently moves the leaf, directs the cloud, clothes the grass, touches the plumage, dwells in the sunrise and the sunset, and pervades the starlight night, that it is precious difficult to forget Him. Even when in the town we struggle to effect good, the good done seems almost our own. With our own hands we distribute the bread; but the stealthy shooting of the stalks obeys the sunshine and the rain.'

'Yet, *you* are going to be more in town. Mr.

Horncastle told me that you are to enter the House of Commons.'

'I intended to tell you that myself.' He was as careful to say nothing to her of his tripled income, as he had been careful to say just enough about it to Mrs. Chesterton. 'He has anticipated me. Are you glad?'

'Very, if you are; but this will force you to spend a great deal of time in London.'

'Say, altogether a third of the year. I hope that is not enough to wean me from the silent significance of the fields, or to make me neglect their meaning. If I thought so, I would never leave them.'

'Yet you are ambitious. So at least Mr. Horncastle says; more than you seem to be.'

'And *he* would have me more so . . . Can you clear that?'

He pointed with his whip to some large rough felled trees ahead, which completely stretched across the path. If not, we must turn.

'Oh, I am sure I could.'

'Don't try, if you have any doubt. Wait. I will see what it is like.' And he was over. 'Oh, it's nothing.'

The roan obeyed her hand and foot. But just as he was going to take his spring, a blackbird, calling as it went, darted out of the copse, and flew across the path. The roan shied and swerved; but she kept him to his timber, and over he went, sending out a ringing thump as he did it.'

'Bravely done. Quite right not to let him take advantage of his natural enough shy; but he caught his hind heel a good crack as he went over.'

Old Jeff trotted up and touched his hat.

'Ar, that's bad; shoe nearly off. I said he wanted them seen to; but Miss Isabelle *would* come out, Mr. Mortimer,' touching his hat again respectfully, but Mortimer thought rather knowingly. 'I feared there'd be something like this, miss.'

Old Jeff was so infallible, and so conceited about his infallibility, that he was terribly mortified a shoe should come off at all, particularly in the presence of Mr. Mortimer, of whose good opinion he was specially jealous. 'It never happened afore, did it, miss?'

'Never, Jeff; nor does it matter now, does it, Mr. Dyneley?'

'It is very nearly off altogether,' Mortimer an-

swered. 'I am sure it is not Jeff's fault, but mine, for taking you over that clumsy thing.'

'There's a woodman's place, three quarters of a mile off, as I know.' Then, musingly, 'I could take him there, Mr. Mortimer. The shoe 'll last while we get home, so and it's properly hammered to, for a time.'

'But we can all ride there,' said Miss Chesterton, 'can we not?'

'Well, we *could*, miss; but the short cut's a precious bad 'un for you to go, and your habit, miss; and the long 'un 's a good mile and three quarter. That it is, sir!' Mortimer was off horseback in a moment.

'Yes; let Jeff take him and bring him back as quickly as possible. It will save time. Permit me. And he placed himself to assist her in dismounting.

A woman instinctively obeys most men, when they command and give her no time to think. Mortimer had not given her a second; and precedent assisted instinct in this case to prompt obedience. She dropped lightly to the ground.

'Be as quick as you can, Jeff,' she said.

'Yes, miss;' but as he rode away, he muttered

to himself. 'Not quicker than need be. If he don't do it now, he don't mean to do it at all, and I give him up; but trust Mr. Mortimer, or *I*'m no judge. He'll do it now or—so, lass, quiet then;' and the rest of his speech was spent upon the mare he himself was riding.

Special interpositions of the gods are not the creed now-a-days, and will certainly not be pleaded for here. But a wise old Father, who probably could not, at the time in which he wrote, comprehend the full force of his apophthegm, has said: *Ordinatissimum est minus interdum ordinate fieri.* The extraordinary is no violation, but rather a most intimate part, of the ordinary. And so, though as old Jeff said, 'it had never happened afore,' the fact of a shoe being nearly knocked off happening now, need not lead us to worship and give thanks to any particular divinity.

On the left side of Mortimer quietly walked his own bay mare, and on the right equally quietly, Isabelle Chesterton. But it is one thing to be riding with a girl through silent immemorial woods, with a groom at the proper conventional distance behind, and quite another to be *walking* with her

under sweet leafy boughs, with no groom or other human presence anywhere near. Azaleas, even when they are seven feet high, afford no analogy. The tiny feet, peeping out measuredly, one after the other under the riding-skirt raised by the little hands in the straw-coloured gloves,—the lissom figure, all undulation, where every line was a curve, —the pink-budded lips, the smooth, rounded cheek, and swerving chin, the blue eyes and black lashes, —the summer tresses, and the soft permeating voice—all were so *close* to him that in their proximate presence he positively almost forgot his own. He certainly was strangely silent; and when at last she said—

'Don't you think so?'

He was forced to exclaim—

'Think what? Pardon me. I declare I did not hear what you said.'

'Don't you think that you will find yourself gradually more and more drawn by the strong influence of ambition into the turbulent town, and weaned from nature in your own despite; so gradually that you will not be alarmed, and will therefore never think of resisting?'

'Possibly. But, *then*, our bond must tell in my favour. Then, you will have to help me, to warn me, to liberate me from a tyranny almost as deplorable as that of which *you* are the subject. You will do so?'

'If I can: if I have room to reach you. But that is improbable.'

His manner suddenly lost all tinge of absence. He spoke rapidly and with earnest warmth.

'You *must* have room. It can be endured no longer. The forms of a too polite civilization make what fetters still remain only the worse to bear, and the more difficult to break. But shame on us if, hampered by the polished conventionalities of our time, we shut our eyes to rocks and have no strong hands to set the captive free.' He halted and let the mare freely crop, as she had long been striving to snatch at, the tufts of longer grass. 'I *will* emancipate you. But I can give you liberty only through the amulet of love. Isabelle! will you be my wife?'

She turned so pale that, from dread almost as much as from tenderness, he stretched his arm towards her. She almost dropped into it, and, as

if from faintness, laid her head upon his shoulder, and closed her eyes. He bent down, and softly kissed them both.

'Tell me, sweet, do you love me?'

The face turned over, and was hidden in his breast, and the little arms crept slowly up around his neck. She was sobbing. The mare looked up and stretched her head towards them till she touched the golden hair which alone was visible.

'See! It is not I only who am waiting for an answer.'

She looked up. She had sent back the tears. He wound his arm round her head, and kissed her on the mouth. 'I seal the bond of frankness. So tell me, darling, if you have loved me before to-day.'

'If I have, Mortimer, at least not consciously. I have always thought of you as something distant, and as belonging to everybody: to me only when I needed you. Much, I suppose, as we regard the sky or sunlight—very dear, but very far off, and a common possession. But now that you have descended—' and she smiled with infinite sweetness.

'Now, you *do* love me.'

Again she tried to bury her face away from him. But in vain. The first kisses of love are its baptism; and Mortimer seemed to be a believer in immersion.

She soon perceived, however, that a drenching of another kind seemed to be in store for them. A soft south wind had brought an army of clouds in its train, and the first small drops were falling. At the same moment, the thud of hoofs on the turf could be heard distinctly, and Jeff came trotting rapidly towards them.

'I'm back quickly, miss; quicker nor I should have been, but for the storm that's blowing up.'

'Is it going to be very bad?'

'There'll be a sharp rainfall, sir, and that afore long.'

'You had better go, darling,' he whispered Isabelle. 'We shall meet at Richmond, on Saturday. Whatever happens, make an opportunity for a good talk, at least. We can then arrange everything; and I will then not delay speaking frankly to your papa.'

He raised her into the saddle, retaining—as old

Jeff noticed—her hand in his. 'Good-by, then, darling, till Saturday, and God bless you!'

'Good-by, my love!'

Her whole soul seem gazing on him from her eyes.

'He's done it, I'll bet a thousand,' said old Jeff to himself, as he rode after her. 'He's done it, or eyes aren't eyes no longer; no, nor hands neither.'

They rode fast, and Isabelle got but a very slight wetting. As Jeff helped her off, she said—

'I may trust you, Jeff?'

'Trust me, miss! Bless your sweet heart, miss! Yes, you may trust me. And, look you, miss! If it comes to more than this, you may more than trust me. If it comes to—well, to awk'ard business, Miss Isabelle, you may depend on old Jeff—that you may.'

'It will not come to that, Jeff.'

'Let's hope it won't. Only *if* it does—that's all.'

These were the only words he had ever had with anybody except himself on the subject. But with himself he had had a good many, particularly when he smoked his pipe before going to bed. And he

knew, to say the least, quite as much about Miss Chesterton's position as if she had made him instead of Mortimer her confidant. His opinion, too, was quite as strong. He had similarly debated with himself, though in a rougher and less dialectical fashion, which way lay his duty in the matter. He was Mr. Chesterton's servant certainly, and it was Mr. Chesterton's money that he took and was thankful for every Saturday night. But it was not for money that he had served him all these years, but for love; and he was going to serve him for love still. He knew well enough what his old master would have done if the dear dead mistress had been alive, or the new one had not come and set things all topsy-turvy. And as for the money, why, it was surely Miss Chesterton's before it was hers; and Miss Chesterton had the best right to it still. Howsomever, Miss Chesterton should marry whom she liked, if he could bring it about: particularly when it was as clear as two gate-posts that she wanted to marry as likely a young fellow as ever vaulted into a saddle. This was all Jeff's reasoning, whatever you may think of it.

When he got into the stable-yard, he was sur-

prised to see the under-groom washing the carriage-horses' legs.

'Why; has *he* been out?'

'Ay, sure enough; I've been driving the mistress.'

'*You*'ve been driving the mistress! Well, that's a new go. Where to?'

'Oh, a short way round the Chase. Only a drive.'

'Um! Well, I never knew her let anybody drive her but me, afore. It's a new turn, this is. There'll be none of the old 'uns left, soon.'

It was pelting with rain, now: Mortimer arrived at Gracewood, drenched to the skin. What mattered it? He had done the best day's work he had ever done in his life, and was mightily pleased with himself. A gentle but continuous fall was still going on, when he had finished dinner; but it was a mild, warm evening for May, and the air was only the more scented for the showers, and he sat comfortably smoking within his open study-door.

So he had taken the irretrievable step. It had been done spontaneously enough, and as he thought

with every adjunct that, had he had the ordering of them, he could possibly have desired. That, as the blue wreaths of smoke curled about his head, he abandoned himself for a considerable time to delicious dreaming rather than to rigid reflection, need neither be denied nor excused. It was the first luxury of the sort he had ever granted himself; and no boy of nineteen ever revelled in it half so freshly and fully. He allowed every movement of her hand, every inflection of her voice, every change in her colour, to pass again before his eyes. He recalled all her words; he recalled all his own: but, most of all, he saw the little, golden head upon his shoulder, the long-lashed, quietly-closed eyes which he had kissed, and felt the soft arms creeping up about his neck, till his lips had frankly alighted upon hers. Ah! here was the difference. He *did* love her now. There was no going back, no weighing of consequences. Difficulties might be entertained, but only in order to be conquered, not for the purpose of striking a balance. An irreversible decision had been taken. He had kissed her; he had pressed her to his heart. She was his, and he hers, now and for ever.

And the summer-rain fell, and the latakia trailed away, and he felt very, very happy.

By degrees, the indulgence in sweet, sensuous, innocent reminiscences of the day's novel delights wore itself away; and his thoughts travelled to speculations only just less agreeable and productive of joy. Now, for the first time, he fully felt the desirability and promised satisfactions of an active career. Life could not be all love, anymore than it ought to be all ambition: it must consist of and be justified by both. Much, indeed everything, domestic that had hitherto claimed his attention, and occupied a considerable portion of his time, would be handed over to a sweet another, whose tastes were surely as exacting as his own. It was utterly impossible that a girl should have a form so faultless, a face so deftly proportioned and so kindly coloured, a manner so replete at once with sparkle and repose, a voice so carefully modulated, without having also in external things a rage for artistic subordination thus remarkably manifested in herself. Nature surely produces no such anomalies. Freed from personal supervision of trivial but to him all-important details of domestic economy,

he would have increased leisure for manly labours and fruitful intellectual toil. He was not going into the House from social vanity or mere want of the appearance of an occupation; he would be a working member, by degrees he trusted a speaking and originating member. Grattan Horncastle, doubtless, had talked wildly; still, he would make the best use of his gifts, and take results as they came. In his attempts, quite as much as in his success, if success should come, the bright blue eyes kissed so lovingly would look their sweet encouragement. Really, he was the luckiest fellow in the world.

And, so helped, he could teach the luxurious spendthrifts around him the lesson which he had tried to impress upon Horncastle it was the duty of upright, thoughtful men to urge upon an ostentatious generation. He should of course remain at Gracewood, and rent in town during the Session a house quite large enough for their wants and wholly responding to their tastes. Big dinners and crowded receptions were the tricks of people who did not know what else to do with themselves, or the contemptible artifices of shallow charlatans who

purchased notoriety by extravagance, and temporary successes by the coarsest kind of bribery. His private life should at least be his own; his public would belong to his country; but he would never seem to be a patriot by ceasing to be a husband. *His* wife should not be degraded into an election agent; nor the smiles which he wanted for the solace of his heart be prostituted to procuring unworthy means of intoxicating his head. If, in the fullness of time, his countrymen should see fit to appreciate his labours, and offer him the guerdons for which he would scorn either to pay or to intrigue, he would accept the agreeable prize at their hands all the more gratefully that they had not wrung from him the sacrifice or profanation of his home. If, as perhaps there were now-a-days some slight ground to fear, the highest triumphs of Parliamentary Government could be obtained only by turning one's drawing-room into a market-place, he would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that, having done his duty abroad, he would always find pleasure ensconced at home. Keenly alive to the claims of the country, they were preposterous and unnatural when they

trespassed on the claims of the hearth; and he would never consent to be no longer the darling of his wife, even to become the darling of a nation.

These were big thoughts; but there were smaller and surer ones to support them. The kindness of his cousin, whom now he had begun really to love, would not slacken in its energy, and would, if needed, be increased in its force. Without dwelling on Horncastle's, to him, disagreeable speculations, he would be ungrateful to doubt that Mr. Dyneley, who now gave him everything he required, would give him what little more could, under any emergency of family or other uncalculated expense, ever be needed. He had youth, health, spirits, ability, convictions, competency, and love. With such a stock-in-trade, could life possibly be a failure?

There was but one single difficulty, and that so small as scarcely to be regarded. Mr. Chesterton might possibly object to Mortimer's union with his daughter. Supposing that he did so at first—and it really was not easy to see how with

any face he could—the objections would with a little patience be smoothed down. He asked for nothing from old Chesterton but his daughter; and he was well aware that much more than the daughter old Chesterton had not got to give; and if kept to his objections, and at last driven to a refusal by his sister—well, Gordian knots, when they cannot be untied, are usually cut; and he would certainly cut that one. He would marry Isabelle Chesterton with her parents' consent, if he could get it; if not, then without. On Saturday he should see Isabelle, and all that part of the transaction must be coolly and carefully discussed. It was a pity that it had begun raining so inopportunely, and that they had not had time to-day for a little more talk; yet, after all, it was perhaps better that the first sweet commune should have been entirely devoted to sentiment. The day after to-morrow, business should have its turn. At last he went to bed, and slept the sleep of the undisturbed.

The next morning, there was a pile of letters on the breakfast-table. He read them as they came.

At length, as he took up one of them, he thought:

'From my cousin, surely? He never writes; but this is our crest on the seal.' He broke it, and read:

'My dear Mortimer,—Mr. Pollard, of the firm of Salvin, Pollard, and Salvin, has just been with me, and tells me that a vacancy is going to occur at Drummington. Gotthup is on his last legs, and has made up his mind to accept the Chiltern Hundreds. The cat is not yet out of the bag; but it will be in a day or two, and our people will be sure to run a man. It is all-important that you should take advantage of this information, and the couple of days' start it gives you; therefore go down to Drummington at once, as soon as you can get your things into your portmanteau.

'I am very sorry we shall not have you with us at Richmond on Saturday; but Pollard tells me that it is a splendid chance for you. So, if politics really be your game, make the

most of it, and lose not a moment. I give you *carte blanche* as to money. Spend discreetly, but win.

'Messrs. Plaisted and Flower are the local agents. Put yourself in communication with them on your arrival; they will direct you.

'With best wishes, I am, my dear Mortimer,

'Yours affectionately,

'Roger Dyneley.'

'Hang it! that's a nuisance. But there is no help for it: I *must* go. And yet I don't know. I declare I think, on the whole, it's wonderfully fortunate. It is true I shall not see Isabelle on Saturday, and there will be a little delay in doing anything further. But then—if I get in for Drummington before I go to old Chesterton, I shall be much more likely to be well received. Nothing could be better.' He rang. 'Put up my things as soon as possible, and let the cart be round in three-quarters of an hour. I am going away for two or three days—very likely for more. Anything wanted before I go?'

'No, sir.'

'Very well. Then, in three-quarters of an hour.' The servant went away with his order. 'Now for a good breakfast, and then off. I feel game for anything: for nothing more than for an election contest. That over, *vive l'Amour!*'

CHAPTER X.

Bradshaw was not then the important and intricate volume which it has since become. There were schemes of railway without end before Parliamentary Committees; but branch lines were as yet utterly unknown, and main ones were far from universal. Gracewood was only six miles from an iron route to London, and after a three-quarters of an hour's drive, Mortimer was whirled — or rather engines being slower then, soberly but sufficiently rapidly conveyed—up to the metropolis. Here he had to change stations and wait five hours before he could start for his borough. Drummington was sixty good miles from a main line; so it was the close of the following day before he reached his destination.

The landlord of the 'Constitution' inn was delighted to see him; but nobody else appeared to take any particular interest in his arrival. Indeed,

with the exception of the waiter, two or three ostlers, and three or four idlers, who had evidently been ostlers once and unable to degrade themselves to any ignobler occupation, were haunting the places where their honour died, there was nobody about to become aware that such an important personage as our traveller was on the spot. Where were the free and independent electors, for whom he had the previous night, when he had necessarily halted in his journey, written out his terse and epigrammatic address? Where were the printers to put it up in type? Where were the enlightened burgesses, for whose approaching edification he had evoked and turned over and polished and turned over again, both in railway carriage and in post-chaise, those thrilling periods which he was already almost bursting to deliver? Echo did not even answer where. Even echo was silent in that desolate-looking, shabby-faced town, True, it was eight of the post-meridian clock; but it was quite light and pleasant enough this May night for folks to congregate and gossip, if there were such things in Drummington as folks at all, which Mortimer began to doubt.

Dinner, a good, substantial, provincial dinner, was brought up, and that made matters look a little brighter. Whilst disposing of its steaming courses, Mortimer began to break ground with the waiter. The waiter, however, had been at the Constitution but ten days, came from the other side of the county, and knew nothing of Drummington but what he had gathered since his arrival.

'I've seen a good many queer places, sir! and a good many stupid ones; but this here Drummington is *the* queerest and *the* stupidest I've ever served in. You're the first gentleman—the very first—as has been since I arrived. I don't like a place where there's always such a hurry and a skurry as one doesn't know whether one's on one's head or one's heels; but I do like a little company just for a change.'

'So you know nothing about the people here?' said Mortimer, who wanted information, and not, as the waiter seemed to suppose, mere talking to.

'It's my opinion, sir, as there's nothing to know about 'em, just nothing. Nobody never seems to be a stirring, nowhere—except it be of a Friday—

and I've been here only one Friday—and that, I suppose, because it's what they call market-day.'

As a matter of course, the landlord, a portly, easy-going old fellow to look at, came in after dinner to inquire how his guest had fared, and to praise some eighteen-hundred-and-eleven port that had been in his cellar ever since he had had the Constitution, and that was getting on fast—slowly, Mortimer thought he ought to have said—to three-and-twenty years.

The vaunted vintage was produced, and was probably what it professed to be. The first glass was pushed across to mine host, who wished the customary country compliment.

'Thanks! the same to you. Three-and-twenty years! That's a long time. You ought to know Drummington pretty well by this time.'

'Know it! Bless your heart, sir—asking your pardon.— Now it is a good glass o' port, isn't it, sir, and no mistake.'

'Excellent.'

'Ay, that it is! Know Drummington? yes, and every mother's son in it, as I know my own—which I suppose is no other than myself, and I ought to

know *him*, sir, oughtn't I?' and the rosy old boy laughed at what he seemed to consider a joke, but what sounded to Mortimer, who was waiting for other information, like the statement of a rather perplexing pedigree.

'Who is your Member?' asked Mortimer, with well-assumed innocence. 'I suppose you send a representative to Parliament?'

'Representative! We send two, sir! And one o' them, I don't mind saying, whether I should or I shouldn't, wouldn't be there now if it hadn't been for Geoffrey Phillitupp, of the Constitution. Mayhap you don't know him; but if you do, you ask old Mr. Gotthup, who brought him in at the head of the poll not only last summer but in the year '39, when we'd as stiff a fight as was ever heard tell of in these parts, and, I believe, in any other, let 'em be where they will or how they will.'

Mortimer inwardly congratulated himself upon the readiness with which he had jumped at the mention of the eighteen-hundred-and-eleven, and thought that, under the circumstances, he could not do better than replenish Master Geoffrey's empty glass.

'No more, I thank 'ee, sir! just one glass for hospitality's sake, you know, and as it only be to show that one don't shirk the liquor one gives to one's patrons. Well, if I must, I must. And here's your worship's health again, sir, and many of them.'

'A first-rate glass of port,' said Mortimer. 'It does the Constitution infinite credit. I suppose you drink a fair lot of this in election time?'

'Not much o' this, sir, not much o' this; but a good lot o' rougher stuff. They aren't very partic'lar in their palates, aren't the chaps we have about the place then. No, no; I never had this up'—and he held it up to the light, perhaps as much to show that it was nearly finished, as to prove the maintenance of its colour—'except for Mr. Gotthup himself and his partic'lar friends.'

'Is he a young man?' inquired Mortimer, who felt himself rapidly becoming an instinctive diplomatist.

'No, he's not young; though I don't like to say he's old, neither. Now, I dare say you may be thinking that *I*'m old, because I'm mayhap forty years older—asking your pardon for the liberty—

than you are. But *I* don't think I'm old; *I* don't feel old.'

'No, and you don't look it.' (Really, Mortimer ought to have been an attaché, after all.)

'There! everybody says I don't; and I don't think I do, neither. But as I was saying, I might call Mr. Gotthup old, seeing as he's ten years older than I am myself; but I don't suppose he thinks *himself* old. He's a good bit over three-score-and-ten, for all that.'

'He must be a hale old fellow to have stood a contested election, only last summer.'

'Ay, and won it too. Between you and me, I don't think as he'd have stood again, but for the other side giving out that he was too old to be member any longer. But as soon as he heard that, if he didn't buckle to in earnest, never mind what I say, again.'

'And he has no thought of resigning?'

'Resigning! Resigning! after such a tough set-to as the last? I should think not, indeed! At any rate, *I*'ve heard nothing about resigning. And if anyone did hear, I should think the person as ought to hear first 'ud be them as put him where

he is. And them 's no other than your servant, who drinks your health again, and the same to you, sir. Resigning! It's my opinion we could fight it over again and win easier next time. I hope your worship's a Tory?'

'O yes, I'm a Tory and no mistake,' said Mortimer, 'and here'—filling his companion's glass again; 'here is good luck to the old cause, whenever and wherever it is fought.'

'Hear, hear, to that, say I, sir, and to your worship, too. Would you like to look at the county paper?' Drummington, though nowise enlarged since, has now got two papers of its own. 'It's the right colour, and was only published this morning.'

Mortimer would like to see it very much. It was brought and soon disposed of; its columns consisting chiefly of monstrous births, the price of clover, madrigal concerts, premature gooseberries, and very stale jokes. So Mortimer was left to quiet evening meditation.

It was evident that nothing had oozed out as yet at Drummington concerning Gotthup's intended vacating of the seat. This was all to the good.

He had wisely abstained from asking any questions about the lawyers to whom his cousin's letter had directed him. These he could not possibly see before the next day; and meanwhile it was desirable that he should not arouse suspicion by imprudent inquiries. He had been circumspect enough in the conversation with the landlord, and had at least learned from him this consoling fact that, if the Election had to be fought over again, it was the opinion of Geoffrey Phillitupp, who certainly ought to know, that the Conservatives would have a larger majority than even on the occasion of the last contest. One seat had always been held by the Tories; the second one it was that had been a subject of contention for years. At present, the blue flag held undivided sway over the little borough. But, as Mr. Dyneley's letter had said, the Whigs would be sure, on the occurrence of a vacancy, to make a stout fight in order to return the second man.

Cheered by the landlord's confident conversation on the subject, but unwilling to commit the indiscretion of renewing its discussion, Mortimer, having exhausted the newspaper to its last advertisement, and too much disillusioned by the first

sight of Drummington to devote any more time to the composition of speeches which, it seemed to him, there would be nobody to applaud, wandered about the room in search of stray literature. He had extracted all the amusement that was to be had out of the mail-coaches, and winners of the stakes, and smirking young women with their wo-begone lovers, that pictorially embellished the walls, and proceeded across the room to where, on a huge sideboard, were two big volumes. One was the History of England, which, on internal inspection, proved to be a backgammon board. The other was a series of numbers of the 'Gardener's Chronicle,' in which the Almanac and a Weather Prophecy—repeated in each number—were the principal contents. In the hurry of departure from Gracewood, he had quite forgotten to order any books to be put in his portmanteau; so that he was forced to eke out the contents of the 'Chronicle' as long as ever he could. But at last, he closed it. There was not another book in the room; and if there had been, it would probably have been of a kind that, after his just-concluded researches, he would not have felt much inclined to peruse. But all at once he

discovered that there were mines of reading lore which he had neglected. There was a whole library of literature on the windows. Most of it was hieroglyphic, so that a good deal of time might be spent in deciphering it. Some of it, too, was copiously illuminated It consisted chiefly of History, and that of a personal character; chronology cutting an important figure in the record. It was largely annotated; the commentators manifesting a livelier, if not a finer wit than is usually associated with dryasdust labours. Some panes were perfect palimpsests, over the original manuscripts of which more recent enthusiasts had written *their* journals and opinions. But even the recondite collection of monographs was at last exhausted; and there was nothing left for Mortimer to do but—think.

Whereupon he began thinking that a most merry dinner had that day been eaten at Richmond, and that it would have been a great deal better fun there than at Drummington. Doubtless, there had been some delightful boating at Twickenham and Teddington Lock. He looked at his watch. At that moment the party would probably be eating

strawberries on the balcony, or wandering in twos and threes over the flowery slopes of the Star and Garter, in the more sylvan retirement behind, or by the sweet-flowing, rippling water's edge, below. Confound it! it was too bad! He wondered how Isabelle would be dressed. If she would look as lovely as she looked in her riding-habit on Thursday afternoon, in the Chase; if she would enjoy herself, as of course he should like her to do; or if her pleasure would he spoiled by his absence, which he should also rather like; if the Gorgon was crowing over his absence, or if she was trying to worm out of his cousin some statement of his prospects; if he should have sate next to Isabelle if he *had* been there; and if he should have succeeded in slipping with her under the trees and having it all out; what he should exactly have said to her; and finally, if he should have had the opportunity of again kissing those fragrant lips; or rather, *finally*, if he should have contrived to ride back to town with her in the same carriage? And having failed to answer any of these questions fully to his satisfaction, he 'confounded it' again, and after another inspection of the palimpsests went to bed.

The 'boots' had gone over, the waiter said, to the Post-office, and had brought back one letter—one only. It was all right. It was for Mortimer, and from Gracewood, where, of course, he had left the address of Drummington. The envelope was simply the cover for a letter forwarded. This was from Horncastle. It ran thus:—

'My dear old Boy,—I hear it whispered in the House, *sub rosâ*, that one of the seats at Drummington will shortly be vacated. Old Gotthup, who stood last year only for pique, is dreadfully bad with gout, and must accept the Chiltern soon. It is said that he is on the point of doing so. I have no more positive information on the subject than this; but I feel confident that it is a borough where you would have a first-rate chance of winning, if your Party back you, as they will be sure to do. There is no overpowering local influence, the freemen being too numerous for that.

'If I were you, I would see your cousin at once, and talk it over with him. I daresay it would cost a good round sum, especially if—as you may count upon—our side start a man against you.

'You will see the necessity of burning this, and of not mixing up my name with the transaction. Nothing but my friendship for you would induce me to give you information which will be able to turn to our disadvantage; but we are in such a miserable plight, that the loss or gain of one seat can make no matter.

'Anything I can do for you I will. Always, my dear old boy, yours most faithfully,

'GRATTAN HORNCASTLE.

'*Temple, May* 17, 1842.'

'It's very well I came, after all. By Jove! what thundering good ham! My cousin was not a moment too soon. Something like a crumpet! Probably they have both heard it in the House from the same source; though, by the way, my cousin says he heard it from Pollard. How mad old Phillitupp would be if he knew I was before him. Horncastle little thinks I am at Drummington already. He cannot have seen my cousin, or he surely would have told him. But my cousin goes to the House so rarely. At any rate, this looks like business. Sharp's the word. I must go and find

out Plaisted and Flower's offices. It will not do to ask my friend here. I will wander about the place till I find them. *That* won't take long, I expect.'

As he thrust the breakfast-table from him, rose, and turned, he saw to his surprise the street anything but empty. It was quite alive with people, moving and in rather gay but certainly not market attire. Then he noticed that the bells were ringing; and he suddenly remembered that it was Sunday. Travelling usually confuses one's accuracy as to the calendar. It was perfectly evident that he could not see Messrs. Plaisted and Flower that day, and that it must be got through to the best of his ability without the furtherance of any business-like views. Yet, after all, it might be utilized. The intervention of the Sabbath was not so unfortunate to him after all. He could not have a more favourable opportunity for taking stock of his future constituents than such as presented itself within the walls of the parish church. Everybody seemed walking in the same direction, and that direction the one from which came the sound of bells. Dissent had not yet gained a footing in Drummington. And with the exception of a few Friends, who are not

more singular in their simple dress than in their sweet habit of never introducing religious discord along with their presence, all the Drummington world and his wife held by the Establishment. As might be at best expected under such circumstances, the arrangement of the parish church, its services, its sermons, and its clergymen, were all alike conventional and respectable, but not remarkably earnest either in appearance or in conduct. Religious rivalry being absent, there was no motive power beyond habit to prompt or foster ceremonial observances. So that Drummington prayed religiously at home on week-days, and was religiously gathered together twice of a Sunday. It was not particularly good, nor do I think that it was particularly bad. It thought itself, however, particularly righteous. Not getting himself put in a prominent position, Mortimer could not hear most of the prayers; and though he heard all, he could not understand any of the sermon. Most people, however, are comforted by a great deal they do not understand, and on the remaining half of the congregation, on whom it did not act as an actual soporific, it probably produced the effect of

a religious lullaby, analogous to the words-without-sense with which nurses quiet children. Mortimer was not sleepy; and by the time the sermon had come to a close, had formed a rather unfavourable opinion of the people whose suffrages he was shortly to court. They were very ugly, to begin with; and to go on with, they were in a constant state of oscillation between nod and yawn. Very probably, they were much in the open air and worked very hard all the week. So that now, when they had nothing particular to do and very little oxygen to breathe, like the poor cab-horse taken out of the shafts, they broke down. There were a great many children who, if they happened to oversleep their parents, got well shaken when these awoke; and when they were fairly roused, spent the interval between that siesta and the next in the vain attempt to make up their minds which foot should have precedence of the other. The women were gaudily dressed, and the men were ominously stolid. The vanity of the first might be counted on and turned to good purpose in the contest; but how were these last to be influenced? His Election Address, as it stood at present, would be simply unintelligible;

and the speeches, such as he would naturally deliver, would be but little more appropriate. Then he gained comfort by the reflection that, say what he would, it would be fully as comprehensible to them as this morning's sermon; and was there any reason to think that the reverend gentleman was usually more clear than to-day? He remembered the '*omne ignotum*' principle, and took heart. But for all that, he felt rather disgusted. There was this balm, however, for his honour. The spirit of the constitution held that a man was the representative of the whole nation, not the delegate of the constituency with which his name happened to be connected. Hence if the stupidity of Drummington could momentarily be galvanized into sufficient enlightenment to elect Mortimer Dyneley for its member, he would find in the Hall of St. Stephen's a more congenial forum for the exercise of his powers. Whereupon he perceived that morning service was over, that everybody was awake now, and that he must depart with the crowd. The young women nudged each other's elbows, and simpered and whispered; but beyond this delicate attention, he managed to elude much notice, and got back to the inn.

In the afternoon he explored on foot the country round about, taking as companion the landlord's newfoundland. Four hours' rambling gave him as low an opinion of nature as of humanity in the quarter to which it began to appear to him he had been banished. It was flat, with very few trees, and no streams to speak of at all. It was tolerably well cultivated; and that was the most that could be said for it. About a mile-and-a-half from home he was caught by rain. This did not distress him. Indeed he turned it to good account. The changing of all his things gave him a sense of novelty, which he very much began to want, and also afforded him an excuse for ordering a fire. This was further justified by the night closing in determindly wet, and endued things within with a soul of comfort which he had not been able to discover in things without. The dinner was not amiss; and another bottle of the thirty-year-old port gave a becoming finish to the entertainment.

He asked if they could lend him a book or two. The request brought up Mr. Phillitupp himself, with a volume of 'Blair's Sermons,' 'Zimmerman on Solitude,' 'The Urn, a Poem,' 'The County

Directory,' and profuse apologies for the meagre character of the Constitution's library; excusing the inn on the ground that gentlemen who came to it generally went to bed early, and did not seem to care much about reading. Mortimer avoided any more conversation as much as possible. For he felt that if he did begin talking, he would let out his unfavourable impression of Drummington; an act of indiscretion which he must eschew, and which would best be evaded by silence. He certainly had another bad evening of it.

There were no letters for him the next morning. As soon as he could start with the likelihood of finding lawyers at their work, he set off in search of the Firm from whom he would hear definitely what he was now so anxious to know.

Drummington, though not densely populated, covered a good deal of ground. The streets were wide; so that, in going down one side, he could form no notion of who lived on the other. Then, shops and residences, and offices, seemed all on very good terms, and were jumbled together in a friendly manner. At last, however, at the corner of a by-street, he saw a brass plate, which did not

mark Messrs. Plaisted and Flower's offices, but intimated where they were to be found. This was at the bottom of a silent court-yard. Here, within a large square-paned window, visibly sate a clerk with his elbows on a huge sloping desk, and the fingers of his outstretched hands touching each other at the tips respectively. His lips were pushed out as though he were whistling, though whistling he certainly was not. On seeing Mortimer approach, he leaped nimbly from his perch, went to the door and received him with courteous obeisance.

'Can I see Mr. Plaisted?'

'I am sorry to say you cannot, sir! Mr. Plaisted very rarely comes to the office: very rarely; and we are not expecting him just at present. Will Mr. Flower do equally well?'

'Equally well,' said Mortimer; 'he is here, I suppose.'

'No, he is not here, at present; and I don't think there is any chance of his being here to-day. He *may* be here to-morrow, and is certain to be here on Wednesday.'

Mortimer both looked and expressed annoyance.

'I am exceedingly sorry, sir! Can *I* do anything for you? I shall be very glad to do whatever I can.'

'Thank you; but I fear you would not be able to do what I want. No: I must wait to see Mr. Flower. Can he not be communicated with?'

'He can. Indeed I will write to him with pleasure. But as he is at Bletchley—you know Bletchley?'

'No, I do not. Indeed I never heard of it before.'

'Ha! you do not know these parts, perhaps?'

'Not in the least,' said Mortimer.

'Well, Bletchley is the other side the county, about thirty-five miles off, where we have another office; Mr. Flower always spends Mondays there. He would not receive my note before to-morrow. So that, even if I write—which I will do—it will not be able to bring him here before Wednesday, on which day he is quite sure to make his appearance, in any case.'

Had Mortimer been alone, I fear he would have said something more monosyllablic. As it was, he

answered that it was a desperate nuisance, but that he supposed it could not be helped.

'I fear not, sir. I will write, and should Mr. Flower fortunately turn up to-morrow, can I communicate with you?'

'Yes; I am at the Constitution. You know it, of course?'

'Perfectly well. I will make a point of coming over myself, and letting you know, the moment that he arrives.'

Neither civility nor inconvenience could be more extreme. One day for certain, and another for as good as certain, had to be spent in this detestable hole, devoid of books or other interest, surrounded by a singularly unpicturesque country, and in which, as he now discovered, there was not even the mild refuge of fishing. He imagined he wanted a great many things which he certainly did not require, and so made as many useless purchases in as many different shops as he could think of or discover; consoling himself with the reflection that he was thereby commencing, as sensibly yet as discreetly as possible, his electioneering campaign. The second day he even went so far as to eat stale

buns and stain himself all over with ginger-beer at the pastry-cook's, and to buy a heap of fusty scents at the chemist's, where he had the only real conversation of the day. As he had taken a couple more long strolls with the dog, Geoffrey Phillitupp had made up his mind and communicated to his neighbours that mind, that the stranger had come to look over the neighbourhood with a view to choosing the best route for a railway, and that the snort of the much talked-of steam-horses would soon be heard in steady-going Drummington. The civil clerk called on Tuesday afternoon to say that Mr. Flower had not come; and on Wednesday morning, when Mortimer's patience was completely exhausted, to say that he had, and would be most happy to see Mr. Dyneley. The knowledge of Mortimer's name augured well.

Mr. Flower was of middle age, and was far too business-like to be either very vulgar or very gentlemanly. At any rate he was straightforward and to the purpose.

'I perceive I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Mortimer Dyneley?'

Mortimer signified assent.

'And that you have come to Drummington with a view of some day representing it in Parliament.'

'Quite so: indeed, soon.'

'I have gathered as much from a letter—this is it—from Messrs. Salvin, Pollard, and Salvin. As you know, probably as well as I do, they are the central political agents of our party.'

'Just so.'

'Of course, we are guided by them, ultimately, in the selection of whom they think the likeliest man to stand for Drummington. And I am glad to be able to say that they think you in every way most eligible.'

Mortimer bowed slightly.

'But, of course, the information they act upon is obtained through us. In this case, they inform us that they have heard that Mr. Gotthup is on the eve of resigning his seat, and at the same time write to us to learn what we have heard. Now—'

'Mr. Dyneley—my cousin, I mean—tells me in his letter that he heard it from Mr. Pollard.'

'Really. In this letter—you see, there it is—they say that Mr. Pollard heard it from Mr. Dyneley. That, however, is unimportant. There is

an error on one side or the other. But—as I was going to say—so far *we* have heard nothing of it, though it is the likeliest thing in the world.'

'*I* have heard of it from another and an independent source.'

'I have no doubt: and as I said, I think it exceedingly probable that your information is correct. Only, so far we have heard nothing down here. After the receipt of this letter in which, as you perceive, your merits are strongly stated and your claims insisted on, we shall make it our duty to find out the real state of the case as soon as possible, and you may rest assured that, in the event of an election, we will do everything in our power to secure your return.'

'Thanks. And you will be good enough to consider yourselves as my agents in the matter.'

'We shall be most happy.'

'What do you advise my doing at present?'

'Well, just at present, nothing. Mr. Gotthup is in town, and we must manage to get at his intentions as well but as delicately as possible.'

'That will occupy some time?'

'A little. But we will write to London at once,

and set other inquiries on foot. In the ordinary course of things, we shall know for certain in a week or ten days. And even if—as is, I grant, improbable—your information should prove to be not quite correct, there is no use blinking the fact that a vacancy in Drummington, either by retirement or—or death—must occur eventually. Your chance—indeed I regard it as a certainty—will then come. And it will be none the worse for your having seen the place and got some notion of it beforehand. What do you think of it already?'

'Externally, it is not very captivating to a visitor; nor is the scenery around strikingly romantic. But I have no doubt that it has merits which endear it to a resident, and which I shall discover when I become its representative.'

'That is just it; but I have no doubt you feel it dull at present.'

'Do you consider I ought to remain here till you can obtain definite information on what now appears to be doubtful?'

'Here, or in the neighbourhood.' Mortimer looked rather blank. 'You see it is a considerable journey from London here and back.'

'It took me two days to come.'

'And it would take you two to return, and two more to come here again, in case it turned out, as it probably will, that your immediate presence will be required. It seems a pity to leave the vicinity under the circumstances. If you are really very much in earnest in this matter, I should advise you to remain.'

'Very well: I will take your advice.'

'Of course, as I said, you can do nothing in the meanwhile towards forwarding your views. For the very same reasons which make it desirable that you should be on the spot the moment that the vacancy becomes a certainty, make it equally desirable that you should not give the other side the slightest intimation of your intentions. So far you have not aroused their suspicions. My clerk tells me that you are supposed to have come for the purpose of mapping out a line of railway.'

Mortimer laughed. Mr. Flower continued.

'You will but encourage that opinion, and I should think, most agreeably spend the short interval which must necessarily elapse before our next interview, by an incursion into the next county. Do you know it?'

'Not at all. But I have often heard of its beauties.'

'You care for natural scenery?'

'For nothing so much.'

'In that case you will be delighted, and I cease to pity you.' Mr. Flower did not know Mortimer's more special cause for irritation at being kept away from home. 'You have a real treat before you. Give yourself a week—that you may safely do—and then return to Drummington.'

'By that time, you feel confident that you will be in a position to enable me to commence my canvas, or to desist from it altogether at present?'

'Quite so. If Mr Gotthupp really resigns, we will get you up a committee at once, and fight what I feel confident would be a winning battle. If you will do me the pleasure of calling at my house, which is rather more than three miles off, I am sure Mrs. Flower and my daughters will be delighted to see you. I cannot offer you conveyance. I always walk, both from choice and for health's sake. But if—'

'I will certainly call,' said Mortimer, who was on his good behaviour. 'It will give me great pleasure.'

'I fear we have nothing to offer you in comparison with the temptations of the next county; but if you think of staying in the neighbourhood, we will do our best to make the delay as little tiresome as possible.'

Mortimer drove up that afternoon to Prospect House, and saw Mrs. Flower and her three daughters. They were good, kind, stupid, worthy people, with whom he conversed for an hour and a half, learning many useful particulars about the route, which, at first sight of them, he instantly made up his mind to take. They lent him a guide book, and two or three pocket volumes of the classics from their papa's library, and sent him away very grateful but rather bored. They for their part thought him 'delightful.' Of course he did not tell them the object of his visit to Drummington, beyond stating that it was on business. Whether they worried it out of their parent on his reaching home that evening, I do not know; but they were certainly all curiosity, and would prove stanch allies at the election for Drummington, come when it would.

Nighbyshire, as everybody knows, has from time

immemorial been the haunt of artists and seekers of the beautiful. Under ordinary circumstances its varied bounties of hill and vale would have filled Mortimer with undisturbed delight. Even as it was, his week was one of enjoyment. Still the vulgar anxiety which is caused by having to wait, considerably marred his pleasure. Ever and anon, a commanding headland, a stretch of undulating woods, or a wild expanse of scarcely broken heather, could make him forget all personal concerns. But even the very beauty or quiet of some secluded prospect would suggest a ready comparison with Alwoodley Chase; and a pair of dark-lashed deep-blue eyes, that seemed to want him, would intrude between his own and the luxuriant expanse. Still, that was mawkish, and he flogged the unworthy sentiment aside. He *had* kissed her; he had called her his darling; he had heard her call him her 'love.' She was his. He was quite secure of her. Their sweet secret was all their own. What were a few days? What was a fortnight? Nothing. Especially when the delay that irritated him would irritate her also, and make her long for and love him all the more, just as it forced him more and

more impatiently to yearn for her delicious presence. No harm could come of the interval. Good was silently working through the fruitful fretfulness which begets a more intense and more deeply conscious affection. At any rate, he could do nothing. He had quite made up his mind to see Isabelle again before he addressed himself to her father; and equally to address himself, when the time came, not by letter, but orally. The same held good of his cousin. Whether he liked it or not, wait he must.

The rural week passed away, and Mortimer was again driving into Drummington. Descending from the chaise at the doors of the Constitution, he left his things to the care of the waiter, who hurriedly pushed arm through coat-sleeve and rushed to welcome him, and walked straight to the office of Messrs. Plaisted and Flower. The latter gentleman was there to receive him.

'Well?' said Mortimer.

'Well,' said Mr. Flower, 'we cannot make out whether Mr. Gotthupp intended a fortnight ago, when he was suffering from a severe fit of gout, to accept the Chiltern Hundreds or not; but we have

learned that he is now much better, and that for the present he declares his intention of dying in harness.'

'The devil!'

'Very annoying, is it not?—very annoying. We can only say, on our parts, that we shall be delighted to follow out the instructions of the Party, when a vacancy does occur; and as for myself, Mr. Dyneley, if you will permit me to say it, what I have seen in our interviews will make me only still more enthusiastic in your cause, if you ever see fit to stand for Drummington.'

The following night, Mortimer arrived in London, in time to dine comfortably, and to hear, from a stall in Her Majesty's, the last two acts of the 'Barber of Seville.'

CHAPTER XI.

The next morning Mortimer started off betimes to see his cousin and unfold to him the bursting of the Drummington bubble. Of course, Mr. Dyneley had done it all for the best; and Mortimer was on his way not to blame but to thank him. Gratitude would be most pleasingly manifested by a simple narration of the fortnight's doings. He would also take the opportunity of declaring definitely his views with regard to marriage, and of narrating, should the occasion seem propitious, what had passed between him and Miss Chesterton. He would also probably learn from his cousin more than he knew already of how Mrs. Thatchley was disposed towards him.

Mr. Dyneley was out of town; but where, nobody knew. He had been away for more than a week. Indeed, Mortimer's last letter to him from Nighby-shire was lying, along with several others, unopened on the library table. Mortimer left another note, expressing disappointment at not finding him at

home, and a great wish to see him as soon as conveniently might be.

The next visit was to Grattan Horncastle, whose door in the Temple was, as Bracebridge expressed it, hermetically sealed. All the thumping in the world was of no avail. However, at four o'clock that afternoon, in the lobby of the House, Mortimer saw his friend, and had a long talk.

'I did it for the best. I wrote as soon as ever I heard of the report.'

'And by the time I received your letter, I was already at Drummington; so that you need not reproach yourself with sending me on my fool's errand. It was a letter from my cousin which started me.'

'Really! That's good at any rate, in this way, it shows that he is not only anxious about your interests, but fully alive to any opportunity through which they may be forwarded. But the fact is, nobody can ever be certain of the truth of reports which are always flying about the House. I heard the report of Gotthupp's resignation from two or three men, all likely to know; and he certainly was suffering from a terrible fit of gout at the time.'

'So I hear.'

'It will carry him off some time, and probably before very long. And if nothing else turns up in the meantime, you can ultimately stand for Drummington, and your visit will be all to the good. At least, you have lost nothing by going.'

'Nothing that cannot still be got. For all that, having to go was a greater nuisance than you imagine.'

He took Horncastle's arm affectionately and confidentially.

'See—let us first get out of the crowd. You remember my telling you at Sleeper's garden-fête, that I should probably meet Miss Chesterton a few days after.'

'Yes: perfectly.'

'And I did. I went without any predetermined intention of engaging either myself or her, or indeed of doing more than feeling and breaking ground. But as luck would have it, one of her horse's shoes came off, or loose at least, and she had to dismount and wait with me till her groom rode off and got it seen to. And, hang it! she looked so beautiful, and the circumstances were so favourable, and the conversation somehow so naturally led up to it, that I—well—'

'That you proposed to her?'

'If you like the phrase: I don't. I told her I loved her. And, by Jove! the sweet little fairy hid her face in my bosom, and—at any rate, old boy, the trick's done; and I am only waiting for a fair opportunity to square matters with old Chesterton.'

'You have not seen him then?'

'No, nor anybody else. You know I received my cousin's letter the very day after I met Isabelle, and started for Drummington on the Friday morning. On the Saturday, there was a dinner at Richmond, given by my cousin—*you* were not there, were you?'

'No,' said Horncastle; 'I was not there.'

'But the Chestertons were, or were invited. I, of course, was to go. A tremendous shower of rain put a premature ending to my interview with Miss Chesterton on the Thursday; so that nothing beyond—what was very pleasant, old boy—'

'I don't doubt it.'

'Nothing beyond avowals of love, &c., passed between us. I intended to have a good talk with her at Richmond, and then have it all out with her

father. You may judge how mad I was when I found that I could not possibly be there and could not communicate with her, either; and how disgusted I feel at having been all this time at that infernal Drummington for nothing. I am going down to Gracewood at once, and over to Beadon at the first opportunity. I shall try to have a talk with Isabelle first; but if the opportunity does not come soon, I must speak to her father. I wanted to see my cousin and tell *him;* but he is out of town, and his people don't know where he is. I suppose *you* have not seen him?'

'No; he has not been in the House for the last ten days, at least.'

'I wonder where the deuce he can be, or what he can be doing?'

Horncastle laughed.

'Where he is may be difficult to find out; but it is not so difficult to guess what he is doing. Old age has not tamed his youthful spirits, and doubtless he is occupied with matters about which secrecy, even to locality, is very desirable.'

'I suppose so,' said Mortimer. 'I am very sorry; I saw enough when I was in the north. I wish he

had even the poor excuse of being younger. However, it is not my affair. I should like to see him, though.'

'Which you will, shortly, no doubt. As you say, his conduct is not your affair; and, indeed, he is as discreet as a rich man well can be. His ways are known only to his intimates, and a few curious fellows like myself.' And again he laughed. 'I really like him very much. If you only stick to him, as you are doing now, he will be the making of you; and before very long, you will make these walls ring with your speeches. Confound it! I wish old Gotthupp *would* go off the hooks. I am dying to see you in the House. I will keep my ears open, and let you know if anything is stirring. There's the Division bell. Will you wait till the Division is over?'

'No; I must be off now; but I shall be in town again very soon, probably. Seen Bracebridge?'

'Yes; yesterday.'

'Same as ever, I suppose?'

'Just. Going to the dogs, as usual. Good-by, my dear fellow. Write.'

'Good-by.'

And Mortimer hurried away from the lobby. As he was passing through Westminster Hall, the folding doors leading to the Law Courts hard by were swinging to and fro, and suitors, attorneys, and counsel hurrying backwards and forwards. He had scarcely thought to himself, 'I wonder if I have time to go and see old Bracebridge,' when Guy's face, laden with an important look not usual with it, peered out among the legal crowd. Mortimer seized him by the arm. He turned.

'Who would look for you here? Oh, but I suppose you've been to the House. Why don't you come and see a fellow when you are up in town?'

'I only arrived last night. I have been on an electioneering expedition, which has ended—for the present—in smoke.'

'Where? May I ask?'

'Yes; but don't say anything about it. To Drummington.'

'To Drummington! What the deuce to do at Drummington? There isn't a vacancy.

'But one was expected.'

'By whose resigning? By Langford's?'

'No; by the other member—old Gotthupp.'

'Gotthupp! Why, who ever told you that? I'm sure such a notion has never entered his head. I've known Latimer Gotthupp, *I* have, ever since I knew anybody. Why, he is godfather to that scoundrel, my brother—godfather. Of course he doesn't take any notice of the fellow now—not *now*. But he used—he used; and I—why, *I* am as intimate with him as anybody is, and I've never heard him hint at such a thing. Look here! I was with him no later than—but it's absurd; that's the word—absurd; simply absurd. Who told you?'

'I heard it first from my cousin; then I heard it from Horncastle.'

'Oh, Horncastle! Then you may be sure it isn't true. How was he likely to know? Tell me that! Was there the slightest likelihood he should know?'

'No doubt he heard it in the House.'

'Heard it in the House! I dare say he did hear it in the House. But what of that?'

'But then, my cousin heard it too.'

'Then he heard it in the House too, probably. How do you know he did not hear it from Horncastle? Look here, old fellow! Horncastle's a

very clever fellow; he's too clever—too clever. Don't you mind too much what Horncastle says.'

'But I am sure he would do anything in the world for me; and I am immensely fond of him.'

'Fond of him! So am I; I'm fond of him. I should think I *was* fond of him. I should like to know who can pretend to be more fond of him than the person who put him where he is; which *I* did, though he mayn't know it, or pretend he doesn't know it—pretend he doesn't. But he knows it. Yes; and I know it. But he won't be there much longer if he doesn't mind what he's about. Everybody's talking about him—everybody.'

This was poor Guy's old mania, which always raised the same smile on Mortimer's face. Guy was far too much in earnest, however, to see it.

'He pays nobody—nobody. I don't allow it to anybody else, but it's true; I know it's true. And then there's that woman—his wife. Of course, he's married to her. He's a clever fellow, a very clever fellow; but if he can go on long as he's going on now, he's a cleverer fellow even than I imagine him to be.'

'I have just this moment seen him.'

'Seen him! *I* never see him. Nobody ever sees him, unless they see him in the House. He's always there, I know.'

'And he always ought to be,' said Mortimer.

'Yes, but—'

And Bracebridge went off into another long lugubrious rigmarole which need not be set down. In his heart of hearts, which he always opened to Mortimer, he entertained the gravest fears for their friend. Before the world, which was really saying all the kind things which he repeated, he defended Horncastle unflinchingly, and still cracked him up to the skies. The honest fellow would have done anything on earth for Grattan. But he could neither comprehend nor approve much of Grattan's conduct; and his knack of seeing the dark side of the future, and of believing that 'the dogs' were the natural bourne of most earthly wayfarers, led him always to express himself to Mortimer in the above desponding language. He was sanguine enough about Mortimer's prospects, and whilst regretting and still continuing to ridicule the fruitless visit to Drummington, was delighted to hear that Mr. Dyneley, however ill-informed, had instigated

the journey. Guy Bracebridge thoroughly believed in Mortimer and Mortimer's future, not on account of his abilities, or for any special merits he might possess—though Bracebridge was quite alive to them—but because he had a cousin at his back with ten or fifteen or twenty thousand per annum. Poor Guy's great trouble all his life had been want of money. He certainly had not been a very successful man. And it was only natural that he should attribute his failure rather to want of money than to want of anything else. He judged other people fairly enough by himself. He felt confident that, with a little money, he could have cut a very respectable figure in the world; and he did not feel the slightest confidence in anybody else's cutting it without. If anybody contrived to do so, all Guy could say was that he was a devilish clever fellow, and that he would advise people to wait and see the end of it. On any score, success under such circumstances was too improbable to be taken into account. So that he regarded the luckless returner from Drummington, whom very few people had ever heard of, as a much greater hero than the sitting member for Veerborough, who was in pretty

nearly everybody's mouth, but who was said to be also in pretty nearly everybody's debt.

'And what are *you* doing here?' Mortimer asked.

'Oh, some infernal reporting. But what can a fellow do? It's beastly work that I have, and devilish bad pay.' How honest he was! 'I've been wanting Horncastle to get me into the staff of the "Oriflamme;" but I don't think he has the time or will give himself the trouble to do it. At any rate, he hasn't done it.'

Horncastle had not tried: but for a very simple reason. He knew well enough that if he tried till doomsday he would never succeed in getting Bracebridge on to any such organ, except to be quietly let down again. Horncastle was willing enough to help Bracebridge when he could do so without injuring himself; in this case, he would not have avoided the latter in uselessly attempting to accomplish the former.

'I wish *you* were in, old boy. I know you'd give a fellow a lift.'

'Wait till I am in,' said Mortimer.

'Oh, you are sure to be in. But Drummington's no use, no use at all. Something else'll turn up.

You stick to your cousin, and *you*'re all right. Ah! if I had such a chance!'

'Well, good-by. Can I do anything for you?'

'Nothing, old fellow, thanks. I shan't forget the fifteen pounds on the 24th. Shall I pay it into your bank?'

'If you like. I don't want it at present.'

'Not now that you've got such a lift.' He referred to his friend's increased income. 'But I'll pay it in. If I find I want it again later, I'll ask you.'

'Do so; you know I am always delighted.'

That night there was a fierce debate in the House, which lasted till nearly three hours after midnight. Grattan Horncastle took a prominent part in it, and more than ever established a reputation among his enemies for want of modesty, among his friends for possession of ability. He was accompanied as far as Charing Cross by two or three of those who had sided with him in debate, and then proceeded alone along the Strand to his chambers in the Temple. He entered them as quietly as key and foot can enter; but an ear was listening, and a heart waiting, for his return.

'Did you get a chance of speaking, Grattan?'

'Yes; I caught the Speaker's eye at a most favourable moment, when the House was very full, and produced the best effect, I believe, I have yet produced.'

'And they received your speech well? How long was it?'

'About forty minutes.'

'I hope it will be reported at length, to-morrow.'

'You must not be disappointed if it is not: it takes some time to establish oneself thoroughly.'

'O but, Grattan dear, you are established. Tell me, has anything gone wrong? you look thoughtful.'

'Yes; something has. I had forgotten all about it in the interest of this Question; and it only now recurs to me. I have seen Mortimer Dyneley.'

'Well?' She sat up anxiously in the bed.

'I fear your letter missed fire altogether.'

'You don't say so!'

'At least, it failed to prevent what I so much wished to prevent.'

'Did they meet, then?'

'Yes; he saw her on the Thursday in Alwoodley Chase.'

'And what occurred?'

'Everything. The avowal both of his love and of hers.'

'Oh, *what* a pity! But were they alone?'

'Yes; for a time. Her horse cast a shoe, and the groom had to leave them together long enough for the mischief to be done.'

'And there was a regular love-scene?'

'I fear so, from what Mortimer said, and the way in which he spoke this afternoon.'

'I *am* grieved.'

'And so am I. Heaven knows I love Mortimer vastly, and would do everything to save him from pain.'

She leaned her chin upon her hand, her elbow resting on the bed.

'Are you sure it is not too late to save yourself from something worse? Having succeeded so far, he may gain his point.'

'So he may, Nelly; though I was not thinking of that. I was thinking of the pain he will suffer *now*, if he does not. If I could only have prevented their meeting on Thursday, everything might have gone right; now, something *must* go

wrong. But I am awfully tired; I must think it out to-morrow, and see what is best to be done.'

The young vivacity of the year had gone. June, in spite of her flowers, is a sober though a comely matron, by the side of exuberant but transitory May. Gracewood looked lovely. It was all perfume and colour; blushing with roses, and fragrant with the bloom of laurel and elder. It was a time for deep, judicial thought, when one's judgment is liable to be warped neither by leaps of the vernal blood, nor jaundiced by the insidious discolorations of autumnal despondency; a time when one can look things fairly in the face, acknowledge facts, and be not disheartened by them, nor yet by them be beckoned illusorily out of one's legitimate path. It is essentially a self-sufficient period, beautiful enough to provoke no retrospect, steady enough to suggest no anticipations. It is the one peculiar season in which the Present gets fairly treated.

Calmly regarding his position, Mortimer was satisfied. His cousin had not as yet succeeded in procuring him a seat in parliament; but he had tried, and so given the best proof of his excellent intentions. In financial matters, intention had

ripened into act: and he could now regard himself as the possessor of a clear fifteen hundred a-year. Isabelle Chesterton had avowed her love for him. And her parents, who could not, even if they would, prevent her union with him, had lately manifested more propitious sentiments in his regard. These were more likely to wax than wane when they knew, as perhaps from his cousin they already knew, the reality of his position. So he plucked off the dead roses, seemed very well contented, read a few pages of the *De Officiis*, and ordered his mare to be saddled.

He had been over to the Priory once, but in vain; and to-day again he was disappointed. The first time, they were not at home; to-day they were *away* from home, but were expected back the day after next. It was now more than a month since the important parting in Alwoodley Chase; and he began to be uncomfortable as to what Isabelle would think of his absence, supposing, as was not improbable, that she had not heard of his forced journey to Drummington. Yet surely, she would have heard of that at the Richmond dinner? Not so surely. Mr. Dyneley might have thought it discreet to say nothing about the borough; and so they all might

still be in ignorance of his earlier movements. He called a third time; and again they were not at home. June was positively over; and he had not succeeded in seeing them. Neither had he heard anything of his cousin. He had not again been in town himself, it is true. But he had again written, saying that he very much wished to see Mr. Dyneley, and that he would go up to London specially, if he were sure that Mr. Dyneley would be there. At last he received a kind note, without address, but bearing a post-mark of the Midland counties, in which Mr. Dyneley said that he had only just received Mortimer's card and last two letters, but that he had heard before, and with great chagrin, of the Drummington business turning out a mare's nest. He told Mortimer not to mind, but to keep up his spirits and wait for the next opportunity: adding that he regretted he should not be in town for three weeks, but that then he should be delighted to have a talk with him upon any matter that might require discussion, and would then give it every attention. If it were only a money matter, he gave Mortimer full leave to act even without consulting him.

Nothing could be kinder. But it was now the middle of July; and he was just where he had been but very little later than the middle of May. Something must be done. He would go over to Beadon just once more; and if he were so unlucky as not to find Mr. Chesterton at home, he would write and ask for an appointment and an interview. As for waiting now to see Isabelle again before he spoke to her father, that idea must be abandoned. He had been to the Chase over and over again, not only on Tuesdays and Thursdays but on other days besides, and all to no purpose. That confounded Drummington—and be-somethinged to it—had upset all his plans. He galoped over to the Priory. They were not at home. Nobody? No: nobody. He returned home very savage, sate down and wrote to Mr. Chesterton, saying that he particularly desired to see him, and would be very much obliged if a time could be named as soon as conveniently might be.

After a delay of five days, there came a note from Mr. Chesterton, saying that he was so much occupied and harassed with the business of the company of which he was a director, that he really could not give Mortimer an appointment at present, but that

he would pay every attention to any written communication. There was no help for it; it was now two months since he had seen the daughter; and now that it was evident that he could not see her again within any calculable period by any other means, duty towards her exacted of him that he should communicate with her father. He wrote as briefly and simply as possible. This was the letter:—

'Dear Mr. Chesterton,—During the last six weeks, I have been most anxious, and have made every effort, to see you. As you cannot give me, what I should have preferred, a personal interview, and as I must no longer be silent on the subject which has caused me so much to desire it, I write to inform you of my love for your daughter.

'I believe that you will consider me in a position to marry; and can only trust, that, being satisfied on that point, you will be satisfied on others about which it less becomes me to speak. With kindest regards,

'I am, dear Mr. Chesterton,

'Yours very sincerly,

'Mortimer Dyneley.'

He felt that the subject was one upon which it was most difficult to write, and that his letter fully reflected his distaste for penning it. However, he could not invent a better. So he sent it off, and waited as patiently as possible for a reply. It came in a couple of days in the shape of a letter from Mrs. Thatchley, which ran thus:

'Dear Sir,—My brother has shown me your letter, and has desired me to answer it.

'I am sorry to be obliged to remark, that your interview with Miss Chesterton in Alwoodley Chase, communicated to us by you neither before nor since, has not prejudiced either myself or my brother in favour of the claims put forward by your letter.

'But as you therein allude to your being in a position to marry, and yet I have always understood from yourself that your income was dependent on the liberality of your cousin Mr. Dyneley, we both think that our natural doubts as to its precarious character had better be entirely removed before any further question be entertained.

'I am, dear sir, yours sincerely,

'Sarah Thatchley.'

Mortimer had pretty decent command over himself; but he tore the letter into shreds almost before he had read it, and made no attempt to reconstruct and re-examine it. Its purport, however, he had thoroughly grasped.

There was nothing in it to discourage, but everything in it to irritate him. I think that, at that moment, he almost hated the woman who had written it. That his income was good, and would be made secure and entirely his own, probably she knew quite as well as he did; but it was the letter of a woman who, whilst she nowise means to withhold her daughter, intends to part with her on the severest and most humbling terms. She had made up her mind that the girl must go; but the man to whom she went, no less than the girl herself, should bend *sub hastâ*, should pass under the yoke. She would be master to the very last time Isabelle went through the threshold of home, and as far beyond it as she could contrive; but—and Mortimer's rage vented itself in the most unusual form of a savage oath—he would take mighty good care that, from *that* moment, she should serve as bitterly as she had swayed.

How had she got to know about the interview in Alwoodley Chase? Surely old Jeff, who, he was quite sure, was devoted to Isabelle, and always seemed very fond of him, had not been so unnecessarily officious as to volunteer any information on the subject? True, she might have cross-questioned and wormed it out of him. As for Isabelle voluntarily saying anything about the matter, that he could not believe for a moment. Besides, the letter spoke of only one interview. And if Jeff had been her informant, or Isabelle had been tormented into a confession, either would have had to speak of more interviews than one. It was probably the last meeting to which she referred. Anyhow, it was quite evident that she was aware of something that had passed—what, or how much, it was useless to conjecture—and Isabelle would be the sufferer accordingly. All this time—all these two months and more—during which she must have been wondering what had become of him, marvelling that the lips which she had permitted contact with hers should be so silent, and pining to know what next, the poor girl had doubtlessly been

vulgarly bullied, and subjected to the ignominy and torture of even more than the usual domestic despotism. Reproaches had probably freely mingled with this cruel imprisonment. He felt as if he could have leaped into the saddle, dashed off to Beadon, torn her out of her foul infernal den, and carried her off before their very eyes. His poor sweet! to be trampled on so!

It was no use, however, remaining in this state of mind. So, after several quick pacings backwards and forwards across the lawn, he sat down and wrote to his cousin. Mr. Dyneley's letter had said that he should not be in London again for three weeks; and of these, two yet remained. So there was nothing for it but to write the following letter, and to put 'To be forwarded at once' on the envelope, in the hope that it would reach him before his return. If it did not, Mortimer would back it up in person, at the end of the fortnight.

'My dear Cousin,—Your kindness to me has been so great and so consistent, that, unable to await your return to London, I write this letter (which,

I trust, will be forwarded to you) without any misgiving.

'I have already more than hinted to you of my affection for Miss Chesterton, whom I presented to you, you will remember, on the occasion of Sleeper's garden fête. I have avowed my feelings to her father, and have received in reply a request, natural enough, that I should satisfy him as to the nature of my income. I have never hidden from him or from anybody that it arises entirely from your generosity; being only too delighted that the world should be aware of my obligations to you.

'But it is not surprising that Mr. Chesterton should, though *I* cannot, regard and call precarious, an income which depends wholly upon your free will and kindness. Am I then asking too much of you, in seeking to be able to give him what I by no means require for myself, a satisfactory security for its permanence? That assured, I have no doubt that he will sanction a union most anxiously desired by me.

'I shall thus be indebted to you for the two

greatest of earthly blessings—freedom of action, and the wife of my choice.

'I am, my dear Cousin,

'Gratefully and affectionately yours,

'MORTIMER DYNELEY.'

The fortnight was passing away, and no letter came in reply. It was clear that Mr. Dyneley had not left orders for his letters to be forwarded. Horncastle's suspicions were evidently correct. The wily but persistent old sinner was out on some little reputable expedition, in which complete secrecy was necessary for his respectability. It vexed Mortimer to think that one to whom he owed so much, and from whom he was now awaiting more—one, too, of kindred blood to his own—should be the slave of habit so inconsistent and incongruous with his age. That the heart of pure, sweet Isabelle should be kept on the stretch by a delay dependent on such habits, was more than he could bear to dwell upon. Indeed, he was in that anxious state that he could think of nothing for any length of time. But for the horrible delay that had taken

place already, and for the consciousness that every day in which nothing was done was a day more of trial to one now grown infinitely dear to him, he could have waited patiently enough. About the nature of his cousin's reply, there could be no doubt. Mr. Dyneley would of course settle upon him at least the fifteen hundred a-year already allowed, and this—or most of it—he would see should be settled on himself and Isabelle jointly. If the letter would only come. On the 1st of August it did. These were its contents:—

'My dear Mortimer,—I have only this day received you letter, to which I reply at once.

'That you fully appreciate what you are good enough to call my kindness, I never for a moment doubted; but my interest in you is greater and more serious than you probably imagine.

'You will do me the justice to own that, whilst endeavouring to promote your views and to further your prospects, I have never manifested any desire to interfere with your movements, or to dictate to you any special line of conduct. Unseemly guid-

ance of your judgment I have never ambitioned, nor do I ambition it now.

'But the genuine interest which I have in your career prompts me to take upon myself to counsel you at the present moment; and I think that the proofs which I have given, and still desire to give, of that interest, justify me in my pretensions.

'When you spoke to me, as you recall to my mind, at Mr. Sleeper's garden-party, of the possibility of your marrying, the occasion was too informal, and your remarks were apparently too little serious to attract, or at any rate to retain, my attention. But now that you write in a strain too grave to be mistaken for anything but earnest, I feel bound to tell you frankly, and at once, that I strongly deprecate any thought of marriage upon your part just yet. You are only twenty-six years of age, and are on the very starting-point of a political career, which I expected, and still expect, to add lustre to the name we bear in common. But I will confess that the discovery that, at a moment of such public import to yourself, you should find time or temper to entertain projects of an altogether foreign and more

trivial nature, has somewhat disappointed and alarmed me.

'This disappointment and alarm it is in your power to banish; and I cannot doubt that you will speedily do so. The education which your father gave you was quite calculated to equip a gentleman, and I need not hesitate to say that the result has justified the means employed. But it did not and could not impress you with the necessity of concentrated work, without which success—especially in politics—is absolutely impossible.

'Set aside then, for the present, plans which are both premature and inopportune. At a later period, when you have convinced me that your desire to distinguish yourself is as great as your capacity, I shall not hesitate not only to settle upon you the income which you at present enjoy, but also to render it more proportionate to your probable requirements; and be sure that I will never let slip an opportunity of seconding efforts which are the chief interest of my life.

'I am, my dear Mortimer,

'Your affectionate cousin,

'ROGER DYNELEY.'

This was not a letter that could be torn, with an oath, into shreds. It was so kind that it all but brought the tears into Mortimer's by no means lachrymose eyes. But it was no less a nuisance, and must no less be encountered with immediate rejoinder. On the whole, it was perhaps as well that he had not, in his first letter, stated all that had occurred; but he must state all now. An arrow—the best feathered of arrows—yet remained in his quiver, and he must speed it straight. By means of it he would alter the scoring of the game altogether. He sat down at once, and wrote—

'My dear Cousin, — I never was so much touched by anything in my life as by your kindness. It goes straight to my heart, and has completely won me. And I do not hesitate to declare, on my honour, that were my feelings only in debate, I should send you at once an absolute compliance with your wishes.

'But I did not tell you in my former letter what I must now tell you in this — that I have formally avowed to Miss Chesterton my affection, and have received from her the strongest proofs of hers which

a girl before marriage can bestow. However much you may blame me, I certainly never dreamed, after what little passed between you and me on the subject on two separate occasions, that you would have any the slightest objection to my marrying. Had I so imagined, I would have consulted you officially; and on hearing from you opinions expressed as strongly as you express them now, I give you—as I say—my word of honour, that I would have implicitly deferred to them.

'As it is, my honour is unfortunately engaged elsewhere. This, I am sure, is dear to you. Nor will you, I am convinced, fail to give weight to the feelings of her with whom my own are now so intimately connected.

'My dear Cousin, have faith in me. It would be impossible to exaggerate the desire which I have for a political career, any more than the gratitude I feel to you for making such open to me. Marriage shall not distract but rather concentrate my energies. I am awfully grieved to have to ask you to make this sacrifice of your opinions, when I should without demur have made sacrifice

of my feelings, had I not irretrievably involved those of another.

'Gratefully and affectionately yours,

'MORTIMER DYNELEY.'

In the absorbing interest which his cousin's letter had excited, he had answered it in the above terms without noticing that there were yet three or four letters for him to read. They were none of them important; but one of them was at least agreeable and welcome. It was from Grattan Horncastle.

'DEAR OLD BOY,—Bracebridge and self are going to take holiday and come down to you. We shall be with you by dinner-time, to-morrow. Seethe the kid and uncork the Massic.

'Yours ever,

'GRATTAN HORNCASTLE.'

'I don't see,' Mortimer was saying to himself, 'what better letter I can devise than the one I have written. But two heads are better than one, and to-night there will be three. I will wait and

take what I very rarely take—advice. Both would do anything on earth for me. One already knows most of the circumstances, and the other might as well.' He rang. 'I expect two friends to-night; I wish dinner to be particularly good.' Alone again. 'They could not have come at a better time. I am not a bad hand at solitude; but I declare I feel anything but fit to be alone.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON: PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
AND CHARING CROSS.